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Heard It Through The Snake Vine

Rebecca Matheson

## EDITORIAL

March 2020: COVID-19. Self-isolation as the seasons turn, and warmer weather begins. This, the quint's forty ninth issue, begins with Andrew Urie's "Spiritual Suppositions: A Comparative Examination of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Christabel,' Lord Byron's 'Manfred,' and John Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes'" which considers the invocation of supernatural elements in these poems which warn against succumbing to solipsism and express longing for a guiding spirituality. Osakue Stevenson Omoera's fascinating discussion of female disempowerment in the Benin area of Nigeria in "We Have Been Quiet for Too Long: Contesting Female Disempowerment in *Adaze*" follows, using Mabel Ewrierhoma's notion of African feminism, which emphasises the complementarity of female and male for human progress to examine patriarchal tropes and levels of female disempowerment in a Benin language video-film. Following Albert Einstein's famous expression, Nadia Konstantini, "Spooky Stories at a Distance: Gender in Katherine Mansfield's *Quantum Worlds*," reveals 'spooky actions at a distance' in Mansfield's narratives about gender, particularly her fictional re/presentations of wo/men in time and space, and applies quantum theory to Mansfield's writing. Next, in "From Rural to Urban Community: Historicizing Colonial Legacy, Indigenous Initiatives and the Transformation of Ikorodu Metropolis, Lagos, 1894-1999," Friday Aworawo considers Ikorodu and charts its urban transformation in Lagos' narrative.

Then, Ogbonna Anyanwu and Eunice Osuagwu's "A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Some Idiomatic Expressions in the Igbo Language" delineates how Igbo idiomatic expressions are dependent upon situations, topics, or activities reflected in their speakers'



attitudes toward the persons or events denoted and the social relationships between the participants in a communication exchange. Following, Etienne Boumans' film review, "*The Cotton Club* (1984): From a Time When Black Lives Did Not Matter (Much)" considers how whitewashing produced a box office failure that refrained from paying tribute to entertainers of the African diaspora. Josh Commander's "The Hollow Christ, His Brittle Glory, and His Sour Cross: *The Hollow Crown's* Representation of Shakespeare's Richard of Bordeaux as a Counterfeit of Christ" examines modifications of Shakespeare's text in *The Hollow Crown*. Finally, Marci Mazzarotto's "Paul Thomas Anderson's *Inherent Vice*" examines Anerson's adaptation of Thomas Pynchon's novel of the same name and its statement of cultural transition from the peace-loving 1960s into the neo-liberalist 1970s.

No issue of *the quint* is complete without its creative component. This issue is honored to showcase Joseph R. DeMare's bittersweet wake-up call regarding masculine mid-life in "Good Morning America." Ying Kong's memoir of her mother's and her own life, "Diwomaodun—The Sin of Being a Mixed Race," and Xioawei Liang's non-fiction account, "Father and Son," are remarkable for their humbling honesty and examinations of Asian culture. Tyler Turcotte's short story, "Red River Raven" is equally uncompromising in its examination of life and loss. This *quint* is also pleased to offer you Rebecca Matheson's spring study of Wintergarden Park, at the edge of Bowling Green, Ohio. As we all self-isolate and the weather warms, here's to good writing. *the quint* will return in June, offering insightful reading in time for the summer.

**Sue Matheson**

**Editor**





# Spiritual Suppositions:

## A Comparative Examination of Samuel Taylor

## Coleridge's "Christabel," Lord Byron's "Manfred," and

## John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes"

Andrew Urie

York University, Ontario

### Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Christabel" (1816), Lord Byron's "Manfred" (1817), and John Keats's "The Eve of St. Agnes" (1820) are three poems of the Romantic period that invoke stylistic and thematic elements commonly associated with the Romantic subgenre of the Gothic. Given that British literary Romanticism was often focused on *pantheism* or the contemplation of a higher spiritual power via the *natural* world, these poems make for fecund comparative analysis, for all three works move in the inverse direction by dealing with characters who develop eerie connections to dark *supernatural* realms. Written from a secular humanistic perspective, this article explores how these poems employ religious themes in order to function as cautionary allegories that warn

against succumbing to solipsism, for all three works invoke supernatural elements in order to elucidate a key theme of British literary Romanticism: the common human longing for a guiding sense of spirituality.<sup>1</sup>

### "Christabel" (1816)

Featuring an ancient castle, a troubled aristocratic family, and a man's past sin that is revisited upon him later in life, Coleridge's unfinished "Christabel" features numerous Gothic elements. Highlighting these very elements of the poem in her book *The Fallen World in Coleridge's Poetry* (1999), literary critic Agneta Lindgren notes, "The Gothic elements are easily recognizable, such as the gloomy medieval atmosphere with a nightmarish touch and the supernatural qualities with their corresponding imbalance on the part of the rational order" (89). As Lindgren proceeds to point out, another Gothic element that is present in the poem is "the motif of the persecuted maiden . . . the motif of an innocent person who, accused of a crime, suffers alienation while not being able to prove or even understand what is really going on and whose experiences thus foster a sense of mystery, fear and terror" (89).

Certainly, Christabel reveals herself to be a psycho-emotionally vexed individual. Awakening in the "middle of night" (1) from her slumber, Christabel is tormented by sexual dreams:

She had dreams all yesternight

1. I am, of course, writing this essay from a retrospective standpoint. As scholar Michael Ferber reminds us in his book *The Cambridge Companion to British Romantic Poetry* (2012), none of the poets of English literary romanticism "called himself or herself 'Romantic'" (1): "They would have been astonished to be lumped together under any label, for their differences from each other loomed larger in their minds than their similarities, which are easier for us to see at a distance" (1).

Of her own betrothed knight;  
Dreams that made her moan and leap,  
As on her bed she lay in sleep.  
And she in the midnight wood will pray  
For the weal of her lover that's far away. (l.27-32)

In emphasizing how Christabel elects to “pray” in the surrounding woods for the “weal of her lover,” the poem slyly suggests she is longing for the sexual act of penetration, for although “weal” is generally construed to mean “welfare” or “well-being,” an alternative meaning of the word is “the mark or ridge raised on the flesh by a rod . . .” (see “weal”). As literary critic Anya Taylor reminds us in her book *Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love, and the Law Against Divorce* (2005), Christabel “may or may not have a fiancé for whom she prays” (64). Yet if it is carnal pleasure alone that Christabel has come to “pray” for, then she is channeling her spiritual energies towards a discernibly solipsistic desire. In this regard, Christabel betrays her inner spiritual confusion, which ultimately puts her into contact with the dark supernatural force embodied by the succubus-like figure Geraldine.

Christabel’s spiritual confusion is further evidenced by her immediate entrancement with Geraldine’s physical beauty, which she erroneously construes as sign of moral purity:

There she sees a damsel bright,  
Drest in a silken robe of white,

That shadowy in the moonlight shone:

The neck that made that white robe wan,  
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;  
Her blue-veined feet unsandal’d were.  
And wildly glittered here and there  
The gems entangled in her hair. (ll. 60-67)

Although Christabel does express a momentary pang of fear upon first seeing Geraldine (“Mary mother, save me now!” [l.71]), she subsequently succumbs to Geraldine’s “faint and sweet” (l.74) voice: “Have pity on my sore distress . . .” (l.75). Too easily placing her trust in Geraldine, Christabel invites her back to her family’s castle. Intriguingly, her invitation hints at a potential latent sexual desire on her behalf: “And to-night you must sleep with me” (l.121). By helping Geraldine over the castle’s threshold (“And Christabel with might and main / Lifted her up, a weary weight, / Over the threshold of the gate . . .” [l.130-131]), Christabel enables an evil entity, for as Lindgren notes, “Evil spirits cannot enter a Christian building without human assistance; they have to be helped, and by someone who does it voluntarily” (113). In rashly trusting Geraldine, Christabel becomes the very vehicle by which evil is transported into her family home – an evil that will ultimately imperil both herself and her widower father, Sir Leoline.

By the time Christabel comes to realize that Geraldine has misrepresented her true nature to both herself and her father, it is too late, as Geraldine has by this point already secured Leoline’s affection and trust:



And now the tears were on his face,  
And fondly in his arms he took  
Fair Geraldine, who met the embrace  
Prolonging it with joyous look.  
Which when she viewed a vision fell  
Upon the soul of Christabel,  
The vision of fear, the touch and pain! (II.438-444)

Interestingly, it is while looking at Geraldine and discerning the evil within her that Christabel also detects a latent element of evil within herself:

So deeply had she drunken in  
That look, those shrunken serpent eyes  
That all her features were resigned  
To this sole image in her mind:  
And passively did imitate  
That look of dull and treacherous hate! (II.592-597)

In essence, Geraldine seems to have compelled Christabel to acknowledge the capacity for hatred and evil that lurks beneath the surface of her “eyes so innocent and blue” (II.603), for it is Christabel’s superficial piety that allowed her to be preyed upon by Geraldine in

the first place.

Intriguingly, Coleridge’s poem employs a discernible domino effect in which sin begets sin, for Christabel, Geraldine, and Sir Leoline constitute a triumvirate of sin and spiritual decay: Christabel has erred by mischanneling her spiritual energies towards the fulfillment of her own solipsistic desires; Sir Leoline has erred in his youth by slandering his boyhood friend Lord Roland de Vaux, who is revealed to be Geraldine’s father; finally, Geraldine has erred by invoking the aide of supernatural powers to seek apparent vengeance – another sin – for Sir Leoline’s betrayal of her father.

Allegorically, Coleridge’s poem highlights how Christabel, Geraldine, and Sir Leoline imperil one another due to their shared inability to commit themselves to a belief system that transcends their own solipsism and human vanity. Like an untreated wound that is left to fester, Sir Leoline’s past sin paves the way for the moral and spiritual downfall of not just himself and his daughter, but also Geraldine, whose invocation of her dark supernatural powers constitutes a spiritually misguided act fueled by her sincere love for her father and her desire to avenge his youthful betrayal by Leoline. This overarching notion of a familial sin of the past being revisited upon a future generation is, of course, a key thematic element commonly associated with the Romantic-Gothic tradition.

### “Manfred” (1817)

Like “Christabel,” Lord Byron’s “Manfred” employs both a Gothic mood and setting in order to examine the larger theme of spiritual decay. The last descendant of a

once powerful aristocratic family, Manfred resides in a castle in the remote Swiss Alps and spends his days and nights locked within the confines of his own tortured conscience and soul, which are plagued by a “strong curse” (I.I.47) from his past. As Manfred himself defines his situation, “. . . actions are our epochs: mine / Have made my days and nights imperishable . . .” (II.I.52-53). The overarching implication of Byron’s poem is that Manfred’s curse emanates from the guilt he feels as a result of the sinful incestuous relationship he had with his sister, Astarte, who presumably took her own life in the wake of having committed herself to this deviant sexual liaison. As scholar Drummond Bone observes in his book *Byron*, Astarte is “a figure who, it is pretty clearly implied, is Manfred’s sister and the object of an incestuous passion . . .” (44).

Yet Manfred’s spiritual decay is evidenced not just by his apparent incestuous relationship with Astarte, but also by his mysterious ability to transgress earthly laws by conjuring forth and communicating with supernatural entities like the Seven Spirits and the Witch of the Alps. Presumably, Manfred has acquired this aberrant ability as a result of his dedicated investigations of human mortality:

And then I dived,  
In my lone wanderings, to the caves of death,  
Searching its cause in its effect; and drew  
From wither’d bones, and skulls, and heap’d up dust,  
Conclusions most forbidden. (II.II.79-83)

In essence, these investigations emanate from Manfred’s arrogant desire to find a means of exemption from the metaphysical laws of the universe that govern all humankind:

From my youth upwards  
My spirit walk’d not with the souls of men,  
Nor look’d upon the earth with human eyes;  
The thirst of their ambition was not mine,  
The aim of their existence was not mine;  
My joys, my griefs, my passions, and my powers,  
Made me a stranger, though I wore the form,  
I had no sympathy with breathing flesh . . . (II.II.50-57).

It is precisely a result of rejecting any sense of spiritual connection to humankind that Manfred commits himself to an existence of narcissistic misanthropy. This narcissistic inability to see beyond himself is underscored by his incestuous infatuation with Astarte, whom he describes as follows: “She was like me in lineaments – her eyes, / Her hair, her features, all, the very tone / Even of her voice, they said were like to mine . . .” (II.II.106-108). In having engaged in an incestuous relationship with Astarte, Manfred seems to have been attempting to express his own self-love.

Viewed from an allegorical perspective, “Manfred” is not so much about humanity’s need for belief in a monotheistic God as it is about the individual subject’s need for some



form of spiritual belief that connects them to humanity at large. Although a brilliant individual, Manfred's tragic flaw is that he lacks any self-regulating spiritual or humanist-oriented belief system. As the Abbot of St. Maurice remarks of him,

This should have been a noble creature: he  
Hath all the energy which would have made  
A goodly frame of glorious elements,  
Had they been wisely mingled; as it is –  
It is in an awful chaos . . . (III.I.160-164).

Indeed, Manfred's rejection of belief in any sort of regulating spiritual or humanist-oriented value system is reinforced via his encounters with both the Abbot and the Chamois Hunter, for as literary critic Daniel P. Watkins notes in his essay "The Dramas of Lord Byron: 'Manfred' and 'Marino Faliero'" (1998),

[t]he abbot and the chamois hunter live by values that, in the case of the chamois hunter, look . . . to nature for fulfillment, and in the case of the abbot . . . to God for fulfillment. Manfred, on the other hand, is so troubled . . . he is unable to consider these seriously as a path to personal salvation.  
(57)

By refusing to yield to any form of moral or spiritual regimentation, Manfred essentially embraces a form of moral relativism that allows him to rationalize whatever he desires,

for as scholar Richard Lansdown observes of him in *The Cambridge Introduction to Byron* (2012), "Successively and impressively, the hero cuts himself free from any form of moral claim except the guilt he carries with him but is unable to discharge" (95).

It is Manfred's intoxication with himself and his own solipsistic desires that seem to have led to his incestuous relationship with his sister – an event that marks the apex of his spiritual decay. Tragically, Manfred's herculean intellect proved insufficient to prevent him from committing this terrible deed. In seducing Astarte and engaging in a carnal relationship with her, Manfred paved the way for her moral ruination and presumable suicide: "I loved her, and destroy'd her" (II.II.116). By subsequently searching for answers to his plight via the dark arts, Manfred betrays his inner moral chaos. In this regard, Byron's poem implies that Manfred's humanistic spiritual faith to guide them through life.

Unable to reconcile his conscience with his past, Manfred elects to terminate his existence by literally willing his own death to occur. As he says to the Abbot at the poem's conclusion, "Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die" (III.IV.151). Yet prior to making this remark, Manfred has also made it clear that he rejects the notion of penance via purgatory, telling one of the dark spirits who beckon him,

Must crimes be punish'd by other crimes,  
And greater criminals? – Back to thy hell!  
Thou has no power upon me, that I feel;  
Thou never shalt possess me, that I know. (III.IV.123-126)

The overall implication of the poem is that Manfred's existence is one of self-determination. By refusing to commit himself to any binding moral or spiritual code, Manfred lives and dies in accordance with his own self-will. In chronicling Manfred's existence of self-determination, the poem thus suggests that there is in fact no innate moral or spiritual "meaning" to the universe aside from the given narrative structure that the individual human subject chooses to impose upon it.

To this end, the Abbot's apparent uncertainty as to what has happened to Manfred at the poem's conclusion suggests the ultimate inability of organized religion to answer humanity's fundamental questions about life and death: "He's gone – his soul hath ta'en its earthless flight – / Wither I dread to think – but he is gone" (III.IV.152-153). Accordingly, if Manfred believes that there is no innate moral or spiritual structure to the universe apart from that which the given individual chooses to impose upon it, then his decision to end his life is perhaps less an act of sincere penance than it is a manifestation of his own egocentric desire to absolve his conscience of guilt. Certainly, a more noble action might have been for Manfred to soldier on through life while carrying the weight of his past sins, for if he truly believes that it is "not so difficult to die" (III.IV.151), then his decision to terminate his existence seems nothing more than a means of egoistically assuaging his guilt via eternal sleep.

As the renowned Romantic scholar Jerome McGann observes of "Manfred" in his book *Byron and Wordsworth* (1999), "Death in this play, as Manfred's death shows, need be no more imposing or terrible than the mortal person who undergoes its momentary authority – unless of course, as the Abbot's life shows, the individual imagination assents

to the Myth of Death" (59). Thus, one can perhaps say that "Manfred" suggests the potential absence of God is, paradoxically, sufficient reason for us to ourselves to some self-imposed system of humanist or spiritual faith, for the refusal to acknowledge a belief in anything greater than one's own self-will is the potential equivalent of embracing a dangerous form of moral relativism via which anything can be rationalized.

### **"The Eve of St. Agnes" (1820)**

Like "Christabel" and "Manfred," John Keats's poem "The Eve of St. Agnes" begins by invoking a somber Gothic tone. Set in medieval times, the poem opens with Keats's Beadsman walking past the tombs of the dead as he observes how they "seem to freeze, / Emprison'd in black, purgatorial rails" (14-15). Familiar with humanity's moral and spiritual weaknesses, the Beadsman spends St. Agnes's Eve "kept awake, for sinners sake to grieve" (27) while he prays for the souls of those who have sinned. Yet there is something oddly disturbing in the Beadsman's religiosity. As the literary critic Jeffrey N. Cox notes in his essay "'Lamia,' 'Isabella,' and The Eve of St. Agnes'" (2001), "[T]he Beadsman . . . dreams so strongly of a better world that . . . he seems dead to this life" (62). Certainly, there does seem to be something eerily unholy about this man's existence. As the poem suggests, the Beadsman is equivalent to the living-dead: ". . . already had his deathbell gung; / The joys of all his living were said and sung . . ." (22-23).

In this respect, "The Eve of St. Agnes" seems to employ an almost Blakean inversion of Catholic religious ideology, thereby suggesting that there is something decidedly morbid about the Beadsman's constant fixation with human sin and its consequences. This is a

figure who does not seem to conceive of a loving and forgiving divine power, but rather a wrathful, vengeful God who will condemn and punish those who sin. By detailing the Beadsman's fixation with sinners' purgatorial condemnation, the poem suggests that the Beadsman is immune to the beauty and allure of the natural world he inhabits.

In contrast to the Beadsman's religious morbidity, "The Eve of St. Agnes" also features the story of the youthful love existing between Porphyro and Madeline, which is the central focus of the poem. As the scholar R.S. White observes in his book *John Keats: A Literary Life* (2010), the poem's "central idea . . . comes from English medieval folklore, that if a maiden fasts on 20 January – [marking] the Eve of St Agnes who was patron saint of young girls – then after following some domestic rituals she will dream of her future husband" (137). Kept away from Porphyro by an apparent feud between his family and her own, Madeline has "ignored many a tiptoe, amorous cavalier" by living an existence of romantic self-denial that has been forced upon her by both her family and the Catholic Church. Believing that that pseudo-Christian folkloric rituals surrounding the Eve of St. Agnes will somehow lead her to have "visions of [romantic] delight" (47) in her dreams, Madeline and other "Young [Catholic] virgins" (47) have been conditioned by their religious faith to simply look to "Heaven with upward eyes for all they desire" (54). As Cox aptly puts it, Madeline has been "enchanted by fantasy" and is "as dead to earthly life as the Beadsman" (63).

Certainly, there is something aberrant about Madeline's fixation with the Eve's supernatural mythology and rituals. By fantasizing about a lover rather than actually taking one, she seems to be communing with a life-denying supernatural realm in a

manner that parallels the Beadsman's implicit fixation with hell. Taking note of this apparent theme in the poem, Cox argues that Porphyro is not the "strategizing date-rapist" (63) that the literary critic Jack Stillinger has accused him of being,<sup>2</sup> but is instead Keats's "most straightforward lover, questing his way through a household of dangers in order to rescue and release Madeline" (63). In this sense, Porphyro qualifies as a sort of anti-hero, for by sexually tempting Madeline, he becomes the individual who encourages her to live her life in contrast to the life-denying religiosity embodied by the Beadsman.

Having concealed himself in Madeline's bedroom closet with the help of the "old beldame" (90) Angela, Porphyro ventures into her room to decorate it with an array of fruits, sweets, and spices, which Cox suggests are designed to "reveal the wonderful depth of physical reality and the glorious abundance of lived life" (64). Yet when Madeline awakes, she seems to at first retreat from this "physical reality" in fear when she finds that her dreams of a lover incommensurate with the physical reality embodied by Porphyro: "How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!" (311). In essence, Madeline's central problem seems to be that she prefers her dream visions to reality. Disturbingly, these dream visions appear to have been influenced by her Catholic religious ideology, which has conditioned her to repress her earthly romantic and sexual desires. As Cox notes, Madeline's retreat from reality is indicative of her "denial of life" (64), and it this very denial which ultimately motivates Porphyro to offer her "the one thing her dream lover cannot: sex, embodied love" (64).

Certainly, the following lines in "The Eve of St. Agnes" betray a notable sexual

---

2. Cox is referring to Stillinger's essay "The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism in 'The Eve of St. Agnes'" (1961).

suggestiveness:

... he arose,  
 Ethereal, flush'd, and like a throbbing star  
 Seen mid the sapphire heaven's deep repose;  
 Into her dream he melted, as the rose  
 Blendeth its odour with the violet, -  
 .....  
 'This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!' (317-321; 326)

Urging Madeline to escape the constraints of romantic self-denial ("Awake! arise! my love, and fearless be, / For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee" [350-351]), Porphyro ultimately persuades Madeline to embrace the humanistic spirituality of love as opposed to the life-denying sterility of Catholic religious orthodoxy. Notably, the theme of decay is invoked in the final stanza of the poem, which invokes a *carpe diem*-esque tone via its invocation of a "sudden historicizing distance" (Cox 66) that serves to remind the reader that human existence is brief and short. In other words, life itself is a process of inevitable physical decay:

And they are gone; ay, ages long ago  
 These lovers fled way into the storm.

-----  
 -----Angela the old  
 Died palsy twitch'd, with meagre face deform;  
 The Beadsman, after thousand aves told,  
 For aye unsought for slept among his ashes cold.

(370-371; 374-378)

By offering a conclusion that emphasizes how the Beadsman has come to sleep "among his ashes cold" (378), "The Eve of St. Agnes" does not offer the reader any indication that this "patient, holy man" (10) has been rewarded with a heavenly afterlife.

Viewed on an allegorical level, the poem seems less a rejection of Catholic spirituality than a critique of the contradictions that exist within a supposedly liberating religious ideology that conditions its most devout adherents to lead repressive lives of perpetual self-denial via fearful fixations with sin, purgatory, and hell. As literary critic Jeffery Baker observes in his book *John Keats and Symbolism* (2000), while Keats himself was an agnostic, he apparently felt that "Christianity, pious fraud though it might be, had a more substantial ethical content than a whim or an old wives' tale . . ." (49). Bearing this in mind, Keats seems not to have objected to belief in a higher spiritual power, but rather to the repressive religious edicts of Catholic orthodoxy.



## Conclusion

Aside from their common connection as three notable poems of the Romantic period that are infused with discernibly Gothic elements, “Christabel,” “Manfred,” and “The Eve of St. Agnes” all function as cautionary allegories given their shared focus on characters who succumb to varied forms of moral errancy and solipsism via their aberrant connections to dark supernatural realms. “Christabel” suggests that one must maintain a sincere and cognizant commitment to larger spiritual principles or else run the risk of being led morally astray; “Manfred” suggests that while God may be a mere figment of the mortal imagination, humans still need a spiritual value system in order to guard against the dangers of solipsism; finally, “The Eve of St. Agnes” champions the notion of humanist-oriented spirituality over the repressive, misanthropic constraints of organized religion via a pseudo-Blakean inversion of Catholic orthodoxy that suggests there is something paradoxically unholy about the sin and hell-obsessed religiosity of this faith. Cumulatively construed, all three poems evince spiritual suppositions that ultimately suggest that subjects need an overarching spiritual value system in order to guard against the dangers of solipsism.

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Knot Yours



Rebecca Matheson



# **We Have Been Quiet for Too Long: Contesting Female Disempowerment in *Adaze***

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the issue of female disempowerment in the Benin area of Nigeria, using *Adaze*, a Benin language video-film as a pivot for analysis. Although entertainment and cultural productions such as music, film, dance, folk plays, etc., are essentially a reflection of the society which produces them, but when the customary situations or circumstances of such society are at variance with the prevailing global best practices, especially in relation to gender tolerance and human rights, it is incumbent on entertainment and cultural product creators to address such dynamics in their creative works to ensure equity, peace, stability and development of society. Deploying Mabel Ekwierhoma's notion of African feminism, which emphasises the complementarity of female and male for human progress, this paper uses content analysis, in-depth interview

(IDI), observation, and historical methods to examine the tropes of patriarchy and levels of female disempowerment in *Adaze* and posit that although the film's cultural renditions appear to be in consonance with what obtains in the Benin locality, it is the responsibility of filmmakers as change-makers to situate and contest the negative socio-cultural practices against women in the Benin area through the instrumentality of films, with a view to give the womenfolk a new lease of life to confront the world at their own terms, get empowered through the recognition of their work in their chosen spheres of life and contribute their quota to societal development.

**Keywords:** *Adaze*, Female disempowerment, Benin language video-film, Gender equality, Nollywood, Patriarchy.

## **Introduction**

### **My Wife Does Not Work!!!**

#### **Conversation between a Husband (H) and a Psychologist (P):**

P: What do you do for a living Mr. Mohammed?

H: I work as an Accountant in a Bank.

P: Your Wife?

H: She doesn't work. She's a full Housewife only.

P: Who makes breakfast for your family in the morning?

H: My Wife, because she doesn't work.

P: At what time does your wife wake up to make breakfast?

H: She wakes up around 5 am because she cleans the house first before making breakfast.

P: How do your kids go to school?

H: My wife takes them to school, because she doesn't work.

P: After taking your kids to school, what does she do?

H: She goes to the market, then goes back home to cook and do the laundry. You know, she doesn't work.

P: In the evening, after you get back home from office, what do you do?

H: Take rest, because I'm tired due to all day's work.

P: What does your wife do then?

H: She prepares meals, serves our kids and me and does the dishes, before taking kids to bed...

Who do you think works more, from the story above?

The above, which was anonymously posted on Facebook on the 11th of April, 2015, not only underscores the fascination and awe with which the world holds "the internet, as the face of the new media ..." (Kingsley Ehiemua and Osakue Omoera 2015, 186), but also draws one's attention to the vexatious issue of 'patriarchal edifices' that tend to belittle or place little or no value on the work of women in contemporary global human society. It is in view of this, the Benin language video-film, *Adaze* (dir. Eunice Omoregie 2003). is a critical launch pad for contesting female disempowerment. In the Benin locality where the Benin video-film culture thrives, many cultural practices, however anachronistic, tend to sideline and hemline women. Indeed, the pervasive denigration

of women by their male counterparts has been observed in many other localities within Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa. The now viral but unfortunate Mohamadu Buhari's (Nigerian President's) statement that his wife "belong to his living room, the kitchen and the other room" (BBC 2016, par.1-2), which was in actual fact a reaction to the interview the wife, Aisha Buhari, granted the BBC on her concerns over the kind of people her husband was appointing into leadership positions in his government, deeply underlines the direness of the kind of docility and coerced silence that women are expected to demonstrate in most African societies, including the focal point of this study. the Benin area of Edo State, Nigeria.

President Buhari's public derogatory and demeaning speech implies that a woman is being told that she should stick to the kitchen and the rooms of the house, including 'the other room', which means that she should remain within the confines of basic biological functions, represented by cooking, bearing and rearing children, eating, meeting the sexual demands of the husband, etc. In performing these functions, her visibility and influence are to be mediated through the man or the husband, who eats the food she cooks but who may ensure she interacts with no one else outside the domestic space, shares the bedroom with her but in the understanding that her significant influence stops there. Such a scenario, with slightly different shades or hues, has been observed in many parts of the world, including India, Pakistan, the Middle East, sub Saharan African countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, to mention a few, where women are virtually emasculated and disempowered at social, political, economic and cultural levels.



The Benins are “a major minority group” (Victor Omozuwa 1989, 317; 2003, 246; 2012, 18) in present-day Edo State of Nigeria. They occupy seven local government areas (LGAs), namely, Oredo, Ikpoba-Okha, Ovia North-East, Egor, Uhunmwonde, Ovia South-West and Orhionmwon, with Benin City as the state headquarters as well as its traditional headquarters (Usi Osemwonta 2012, 4). The people speak the Benin (Edo) language and their traditional and spiritual head is called the Oba, who is unquestionably succeeded by the eldest male child. In a sense, this explains why Sam Igbe (2006, 59) noted that the male folk are generally regarded as the head because the traditional Benin home or community is built around patrilineal or patriarchal ‘edifices’ such as the ‘Omodion’ (eldest son) inheriting the estate of a deceased person. Traditionally, a man who has many wives is said to have many ‘urho’ or ‘doors’. That is, if he has three wives, he has three ‘urho’ or ‘doors’ (Enawekponmwon Eweka 1992, 1; Gloria Ehiemua 2010, 3). The traditional Benin person sees the number of ‘doors’ in a man’s house as an indicator of whether he is a man of substance or not in society.

Mabel Ewrierhoma (2009, 42) asserts that “the Benin society is acclaimed to be highly rich in culture and tradition. However, this culture in its richness hemlines women, limiting their autonomy through taboos and observances which many see as obsolete, behind the times, and retrogressive.” In part, Ewrierhoma’s posit explains why the psyche of the average Benin woman is expressed in the traditional greeting she accords her husband (her man) – “Noyamwen noyaehimwen,” which is an Edo for “the owner of my soul” (interview with Felix Obanor, 5 January, 2017). The women are traditionally expected to bear children, see to the needs of their husbands and generally hold forth at

the home front/home management. Hence, in the Benin kinship and lineage organization there is a marked patrilineal bias and emphasis upon primogeniture (Eweka, 1992, 1-2). In more senses than one, the Benin situation is consistent with the view of Adeoye O. Akinola and Oluwaseun Tella (2013, 103), which holds that “African traditional values determine the roles of men and women in the society and by implication restrict women from family life and exempt them from public service and productive activities that engender development.”

The foregoing brings into sharp focus the kind of value the Benin (Nigerian) society has for women: such societal inhibitions and customs restrain women from expressing and asserting their individualisms. It is in situating these practices, which are not women-friendly or appreciative of the enormous work that women do in the domestic, social and economic spaces of society that I seek to interrogate *Adaze*, a video-film from the Benin film segment of Nollywood. I argue that although the film’s cultural renditions appear to be in consonance with what generally obtains in the Benin geo-cultural space, it is the responsibility of filmmakers as change-makers to contest the negative socio-cultural practices against women in the Benin area through the instrumentality of films, with a view to give the women a new lease of life to confront the world at their own terms, get empowered through the adequate recognition of their work in their chosen spheres of life and contribute their quota to societal development. I engaged in this rather longish introduction not only to clarify terms but also – and more importantly to draw attention to the urgency of unbalanced situation of Benin (Nigerian) women in political, cultural and economic spheres of life. Figures I and II below are maps of Nigeria showing Edo

State and Edo State showing the study area respectively.

### Map of Nigeria Showing Edo State

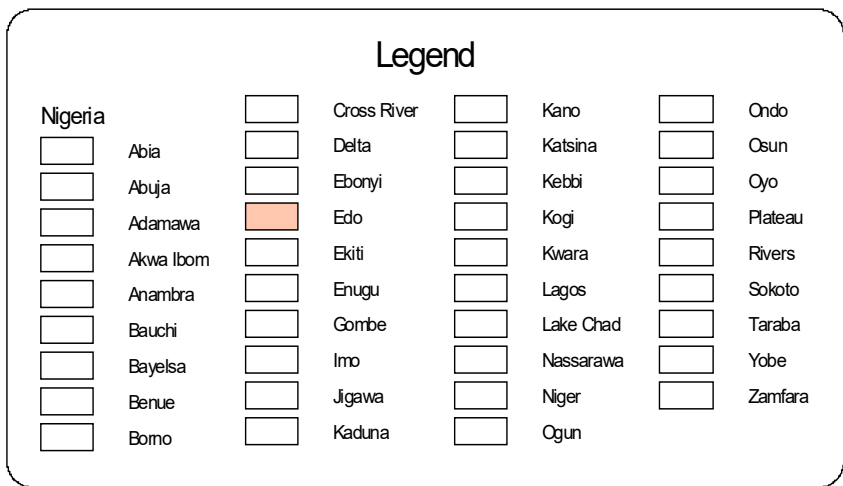
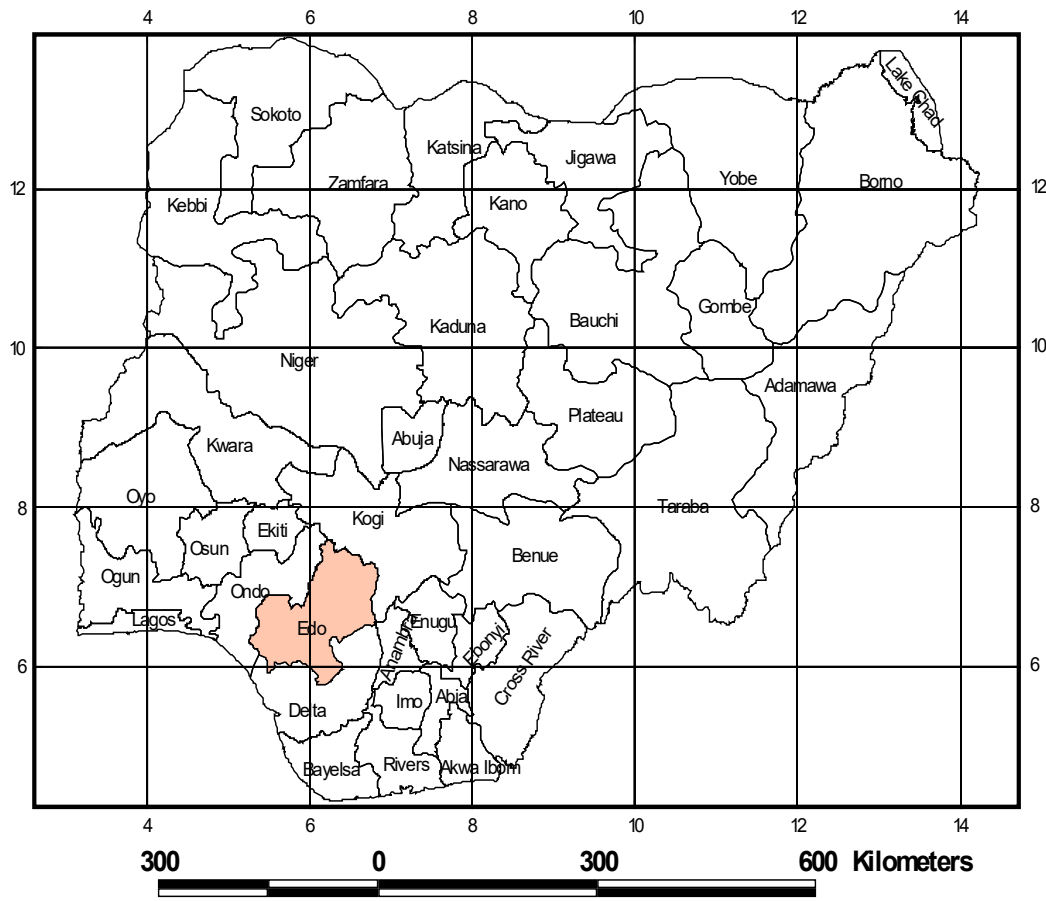


Figure I: Map of Nigeria Showing Edo State

### Map of Edo State Showing the Study Area

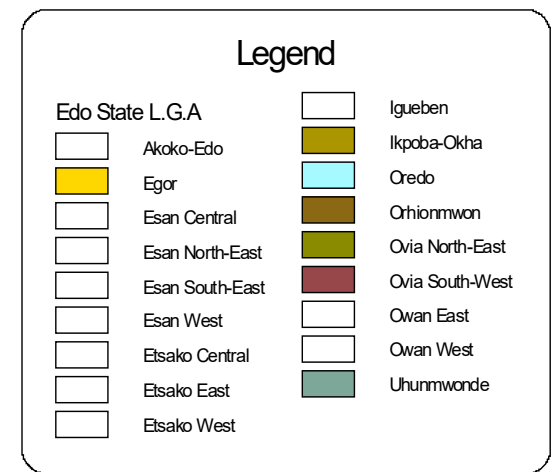
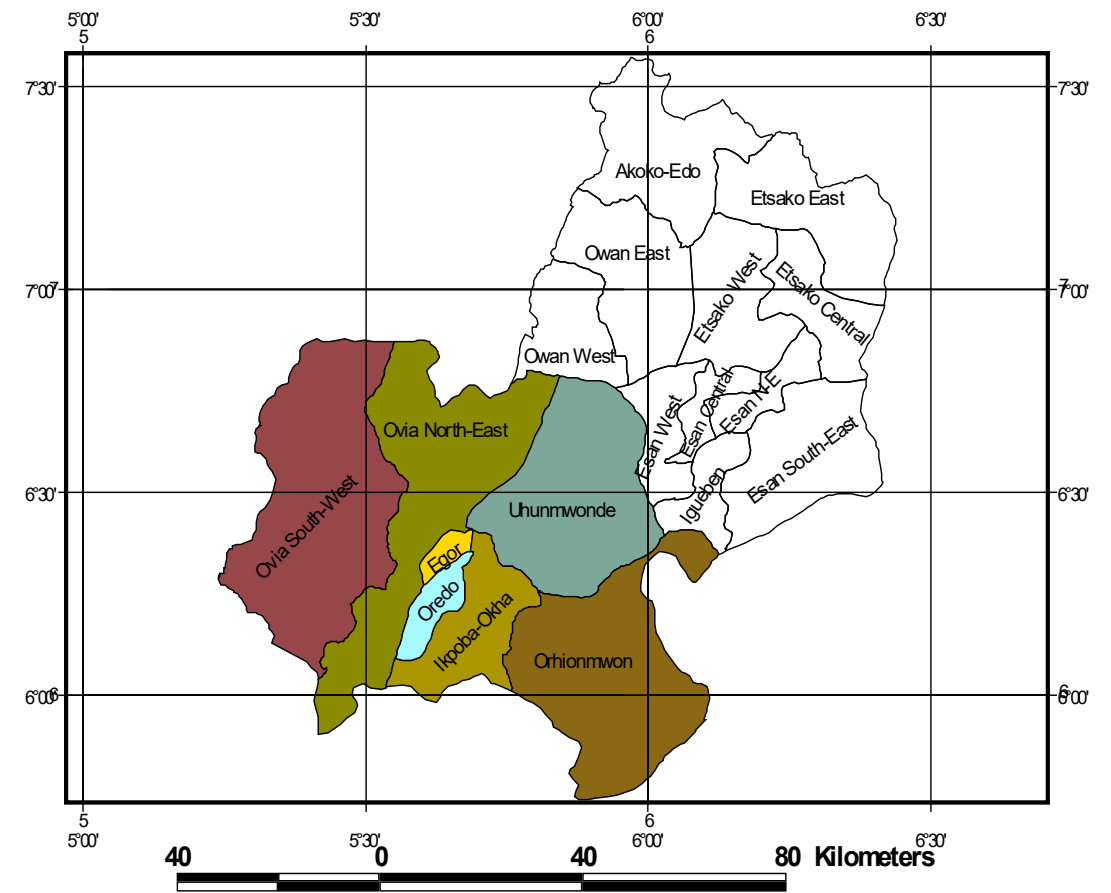


Figure II: Map of Edo State Showing the Study Area

## Engaging *Adaze*, a Benin Video-Film from Nollywood

The film, *Adaze*, opens with Iyengumwena (popularly called Adaze) coming home late from one of his philandering outings but expecting that his five wives keep vigil until he gets in and eats his evening meal. Approving of Adaze's irresponsibility, his mother breathes down the neck of all the wives to fall in line or leave her son's house. At daybreak, the first wife (Aziengbemwin) calls a meeting to inform her mates of their husband's intention to marry a sixth, new wife. This information and its actualisation sparks yet another round of crisis among the wives and children in Adaze's household, which depict how women are abashedly devalued and disempowered in the Benin culture area. To make matters worse, Adaze announces that he is going to embark on a journey and asks Aziengbemwin to take charge of affairs in the home. He travels to meet one of his concubines and in the dialogue between them; we are let into his chauvinistic mindset and by extension that of the society:

**Concubine:** (jokingly) Get away naughty man. You like women too much. Why do you keep marrying? [...].

**Adaze:** It's not my fault. Women are too many in town. I want them to have a roof over their heads. I'm helping them. Besides, I want them to have a name appended to their heads.

**Concubine:** You've tried. But do you know that you are creating problems for yourself? [...].

In very vivid terms, this dialogue concretises what obtains in the Benin locality.

For instance, a woman is generally considered "nameless" unless she is married to a man, however dim-witted he might be. As well, as a result of such kind of union, many children are born without proper planning by the parents or concerned government authorities to check unintended childbirths. In this regard, *Adaze's* home typifies a conundrum of a sort, in which wives, children and even the husband constantly quarrel over insufficient feeding money, food sharing, 'accommodative spaces for the required meeting' of husband and wife which is expected in a marriage, catering for the children, etc. To get out of these quandaries the first five wives suggest to their husband, Iyengumwena, to provide them with some money to augment their trading activities in order to improve the living condition of the family. But he is incapable of providing such a lifeline. The children, both male and female are ill-bred, and most of the time party at night and hang out with street gangs.

At the height of the crisis, all other wives (except Aziengbemwin) collude to beat Imose, who is Iyengumwena's sixth and favourite wife. Iyengumwena's mother insists that her son's father and late husband lived with many wives and she sees no reason why her son's wives cannot live together in peace. But what follows speaks loudly of the irresponsible behaviour of her philandering son: Adaze gets another of his concubines, an underage schoolgirl, pregnant and, the girl's parents insist that she must follow Adaze home. All the wives are set for a showdown while the stormy petrel of a husband (that is, Adaze) gets a bitter taste of the storm he and his mother have been "brewing" all along.

## Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

Like our understanding of the world around us, which has been a constantly-shifting phenomenon, feminism (or womanism as the case may be) has been on a shifting ground as a theoretical concept. In other words, it “is a heterogeneous and complex ideological perspective” (Jaime Loke, Ingrid Bachmann, and Dustin Harp 2017, 122), which has been transmuted, adapted, transposed, converted, translated, migrated, and remediated at various times. But central to all its various nomenclatures is the affirmation that gender equity is a global craving, which in more senses than one, is a work in progress. Meaghan Morris’s (2016, 1) observation, though in a slightly different context, also provides some insights: “compositional perspectives allow you to look at heterogeneous matters and make sense out of them in terms of positionality and solidarization.”

Gender studies is a pursuit of more balanced opportunities for both the male and the female human persons in society. It has grown to become a critical area of study in many disciplines, including philosophy, drama, psychology, film, art history, performance, sociology, etc. Linked at the beginning with the 1960s American Civil Rights racial-equity movement, feminism soon expanded and fragmented as various social groups sought increased visibility and attention (Sylvester Odi 2010, 55; 2015, 260; Ashong C. Ashong and Herbert E. Batta 2011, 13). African-American women, for example, complained that their double oppression – from both gender and race – often left them sidelined in both black activism and feminist movements. Non-American women complained that American agendas and solutions were not simply transferable to their situations. Black feminists in South Africa, for instance, have argued that the

principal sites of female oppression for them may be quite different from both their western and their local white counterparts (Sen Gita and Caren Grown 1987; Patricia Connelly, Tania Li, Martha MacDonald, and Jane Parpart 2000, 93, 133; Elvis Imafidon 2013, 21).

Various feminist activists and movements have also disagreed over the answers to, and the implications of, basic questions surrounding ‘women’s nature’ and ‘women’s nurture’ (Sunday Ododo 2015, 1-2). Are women their chromosomes or their culture(s), and can the two be separated? Some have argued that women possess distinctive characteristics, including an innate capacity for nurturing; thus, they claim, women seek harmonious relations in management and family life (Nelson, Shanahan, and Olivetti 1997). Such “essentialists” argue that if women could stamp their own more highly developed moral preferences and priorities on political and public life through the attainment of political power, the world might be more peaceful – this is neither here or there because we have seen how the former Brazilian, Argentinean and South Korean Presidents, Dilma Vana Rousseff, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner and Park Geun-hye respectively, who are women, were brought down whether rightly or wrongly by alleged cases of corruption and high handedness in recent global political history.

In essence, it is because of the abovementioned kind of development that the “constructionists” countered that failing to take into account factors such as race, class, and ethnicity, as well as the unique historical and social experiences of women, created an unrealistic homogeneous view of women, a view which may be detrimental to the interests of many women both inside and outside the western world (*The Institute for Women’s and Gender Studies* 2009). Post-modern feminists are, therefore, now sceptical of many earlier



feminist approaches, most particularly the view that women share a common unity of interests, one which binds them together as an interest group and which clearly divides women from men. With the launch of the Gay Liberation Movement in 1969, “gender” became an even more complicated issue, and it was soon recognized that both men and women are socialized into prescriptive and restrictive roles, attitudes, and patterns of interaction (Odia 2015, 261).

“Feminist” studies, therefore, expanded to incorporate research into the ways that social structures and institutions create barriers to success for both men and women, and feminists have joined forces with other gender-equity groups to condemn all forms of gender-based social injustice (Loke, Bachmann, and Harp 2017, 122). Today, however, in spite of a growing awareness of gender issues, and in spite of notable achievements by activists in many countries and at the numerous world conferences sponsored by the United Nations Decade for Women (Marcella Gemelli 2016, par.1-4), women still suffer vast inequities because of their gender. Globally, women continue to face multiple barriers to education and training, in property and monetary rights, and to reproductive control and health support facilities. In addition, women are also more vulnerable than men to disease, violence, and abuses of basic security and human rights.

Speaking from the African perspective, Praise Daniel-Inim (2015, 224) claims that there is a marked difference between Alice Walker’s feminism, which is committed to the survival of both male and female and its Africanised versions by feminist scholars such as Wale Ogunyemi, Matthew Umukoro, Mabel Ewrierhoma, among others. To her, “it is worth noting that the divergence between Walker’s feminism and Ogunyemi’s

womanism is that African womanism emphasises complementarity and is basically based on African culture, while Walker’s is for the liberation of women of colour” (Daniel-Inim 2015, 227). However, I find Ewrierhoma’s notion of African feminism very convenient as theoretical anchorage for this study because it intersects strongly with the issues of how African societies have continued to devalue, demonize, and pathologize, both old and young women, and the urgent need for women to oppose such baseless restrictions as depicted in the diegesis of *Adaze*. Ewrierhoma (2014a) contends that “women have been undervalued and marginalized for so long that they are now beginning to fight back and resist.”

According to Ododo (2015, 7), Ewrierhoma’s core concern is female empowerment. She envisions female freedom from male dominance in a society that is culturally patriarchal. Her critical tools of navigation are anchored on feminism and womanism with genderism as the arrowhead. Feminism is Eurocentric with radical arsenals to uproot patriarchy; womanism is Afrocentric with compromising attributes that extol womanly dignity and social responsibility; genderism “offers a feasible compromise between the ideological extremism of masculinity and femininity, advocating emphasis on the human rather than the sexual” (Ewrierhoma 2014a, xiii). While following the footsteps of critics such as Zulu Sofola and Osonye Tess Onwueme, Ewrierhoma, though more poignant, insist on “women’s visibility, audibility, and participation through complementarities”. For her:

The performance of gender, development and positive strategies for social advancement becomes a veritable watchword as the space for such activism

is deemed shared by all genders and sexes. With this mutuality, the dialectics of the self, and other members of the society (on the fringe or not) help to forge better prospects for dramatic and theatre creativity and performance and the receiver of their products (Evwierhoma 2014b, xii).

Moses Makinde (2007, 280) agrees with her to the extent that “in the complementary thesis, neither male nor female is not “unconditionally viable, as one cannot do without the other”. The complementarity between the two (i.e., the female and the male) makes for human progress. Therefore, the way to go is dialogic: dialogue and logic that is genuine and developmental oriented at the family level and society at large, which could expand inter-gender discussions of issues that are likely to engender positive gender dynamics generally in Africa, south of the Sahara and in Nigeria in particular. The contemplation here is that such engagements will open new spaces or sites for negotiation towards addressing women-centred issues on the African continent. I further argue that contemporary African feminism must challenge patriarchal dominance and the relegation of women to roles defined as socially and culturally inferior. It (i.e., African feminism) compels women to confront questions of what kind of life course, values and personal identity they wish to build their lives around. It struggles to extend the full political, economic, and social rights and opportunities already won by a majority of citizens to all women as well as to other previously disadvantaged or excluded groups (The Institute for Women’s and Gender Studies 2009). In striving to give meaning to the concept of gender equality within the African context, which is characterized by conflict, poverty and patriarchy, I use the term (i.e., gender equality) to refer to an envisioned context in which women and

men have:

- Equality in rights and resources;
- Equality of empowerment (having the confidence and capacity to take decisions, to be in control of one’s own situation, and to not be vulnerable to exploitation because of one’s sex);
- Equality in voice and visibility in all areas of public and private life; and
- An equal chance to achieve personal fulfilment and to be active in the development and transformation of society, inter alia, to achieve gender democracy. Gender democracy refers to a way of organising society, in which the individual participation of all citizens is respected and encouraged, and no one is excluded from full participation because of sex (*The Institute for Women’s and Gender Studies* 2009).

The medium of film, according to Adenugba Olushola (2008, 2), plays a vital role in social mobilization and information. Owing to its ability to hold a captive audience, films could be used more than any other means of mass communication to promote ideas of positive social transformation such as the one being canvassed above as well as to consolidate and build new relationships between culture and national development (Olushola 2008, 2). It is based on such convictions that I employ content analysis, in-depth interview (IDI), observation, and historical methods to examine the tropes of patriarchy and levels of female disempowerment in *Adaze* and argue that film and filmmakers can indeed contribute in many ways in breaking down “patriarchal walls” in the Benin locality as well as other African communities where patriarchy, women oppression and subjugation still appear to be the norm.

## Contesting and “Breaking” the Patriarchal Walls in *Adaze* and Benin

### Locality

Apart from negating or being intolerant of the principles of matriarchy/matrilineal value or what Ewrierhoma (2016, 12) aptly calls “matrifocal essence”, patriarchy is antithetical to anything and everything that has to do with the promotion of women. It upholds and exhibits obtuse narrow-mindedness and insensitivity towards the womenfolk in gender relations in both public and domestic spaces of society. In the eponymously titled *Adaze*, Adaze, ordinarily ought to mean a man of means, wealth, with a catholic sense of responsibility in society. But the age-long patriarchal walls that have been culturally ‘erected’ by the Benin society and regrettably replicated in the Benin language video-films tend to protect the central character, Adaze (Iyengumwena), and his ilk, who represent male-domination in a locality where women are generally regarded as “properties” (Osemwota 2012), meant only to be used and dumped like pieces of rag. In spite of Iyengumwena’s criminal tendencies and crass irresponsibility as a human being – a loafer, a child abuser, a philanderer, an unsupportive husband, a negligent father, a drunk, a reckless spender, and a crook in *Adaze*, he still carries himself with some kind of air of pride and superiority over his wives and concubines, which the society appears to condone or tolerate because it is patriarchal.

However, it must be noted that Adaze is a good-looking man who brings his volubility, sweet talk, and oratorical prowess to bear in his repressive but amorous relations with women. Perhaps, that is why he smugly prides himself that he is “helping” the women by marrying them, when in actual fact; it is the women who toil daily to take care of him

and the children. He would not provide enough feeding money, yet he wants to eat the best of food. Unfortunately, the society turns a blind eye to this chauvinist attitude, and sneers at any woman who is of marriageable age but not in a man’s (husband’s) house. What is more, the society cares less if the man a woman eventually marries is responsible or not. At another level, we see Iyengumwena’s mother, who ought to advise her son against the mistreatment of women, reading the riot act to the wives in one of the scenes. Her attitude speaks to the hurting reality that in the geo-culture area under investigation, women are also to some extent responsible for their subjugation and denigration by the male folk. Apart from reminding the son’s wives that her own late husband had many wives, she insists that they (that is, Iyegumwena’s wives) must make sure that they put sumptuous meal on her son’s table regardless of whether he gives them enough feeding allowance or not or whether he comes home late or not.

For Benin women, as depicted in *Adaze*, to effectively liberate themselves from the male-constructed fetters, they must close ranks and collectively assert themselves as human beings who are equally endowed with mental, social, economic, political resources like their male-counterparts and do not need the consent or approval of the males to make successes out of their lives. The point being made is that Benin women in the 21st century must boldly challenge the status quo in their acts, aspirations and whatsoever decisions they make. They should relentlessly pursue the virtues that would ennoble their personhoods while earning the respects of their male counterparts in healthy pursuits that are aimed at improving the Benin society in particular and Nigeria generally. For example, Benin women would do well to begin to go for modern education in the professions, including filmmaking as part of the larger agenda of repositioning themselves within the

society.

Furthermore, in the geo-cultural space under investigation, the men tend to hide under the 'cloaks' of holy books such as the Christian Bible, the Muslim Koran as well as the African Traditionalist Religion (ATR) creeds, which tend to compare a woman to a "weaker vessel" and the creation story of a woman emanating from a single rib of man. In *Adaze*, Iyengumwena constantly reminds his wives, "... it not my fault that I was created a male and if you are not comfortable with that you could appeal to God himself." Such kinds of ridiculous reasoning have been exploited by many Nigerian men (especially in the Benin-speaking area), who hide under certain religio-cultural or traditional entrapments to push women to the "wall". The negative rub-off of such kinds of trappings, which are regrettably extended to girl-children within the diegesis of *Adaze*, has a multilevel impact on society. Iyengumwena decoys a teenage girl, with gifts and sweet tongue, and impregnates her, without her even knowing that she has been put on the family way. But when the "bubble bursts" (that is, when the import of her flirting with Iyengumwena dawns on her with her getting pregnant), she becomes the object of scorn in the society, but nothing adverse really happens to Iyengumwena who ought to be prosecuted and penalized for girl-child abuse. The girl is rejected by her family, and jeered at by her peers as she drops out of school to begin a family life that she is not prepared for.

In a way, the preceding filmic trope speaks to girl-children marriages, which are widespread in the Nigerian society, particularly among the so-called adherents of religio-traditional tenets, who see women as chattels to be used, but valorise patriarchy. In another instance in the film, the girl-children in Adaze's household are not given proper upbringing as regards the social etiquettes, savoir-vivre, coping strategies, and savoir

faire girls or women usually require in navigating the labyrinths of a male-dominated environment. This is ostensibly because their father and, indeed, the society perceive them as nobodies. They are left to their own devices and also expected to fend for themselves even as teenagers, while Adaze, their father, is busy marrying more wives and violating other girls. It is this kind of scenario that plays out in reality, with many young girls going into prostitution and joining street gangs in order to "survive" in the Benin geo-cultural area. But the girl-children and women must rise up to the occasion to fight against this systematic twin tag of "rejection and repression," which is placed on them and emancipate themselves from the shackles of such cruelty and dehumanising socio-cultural practices.

At any rate, one is empowered when one can "solve problems, make decisions to be proactive, and have a sense of control, even in problematic situations" (Tomi Järvinen 2007, 174). In other words, regardless of one's gender, if one can take on challenges head on as portrayed in the collective activity of Adaze's wives at the end of the day in *Adaze*, there is bound to be subversive, significant possibilities. It could profit the society to pay attention to such a scene shown in the film regardless of the actual possibility of such an action in Benin women's real life. Even though literally, the womenfolk is able to contest Adaze's authority and make a firm decision, which crumpled his "world" like a pack of cards in the film. Chances are that one's confidence would be bolstered, thereby mentally empowering oneself, whether the larger society approves of it or not. At this point too, one could hazard a guess that the man, Adaze, begins to experience some forms of verbal and psychological abuse or violence. However, this tangent is outside the purview of this study, but could constitute the basis of a future research. Another angle to the issue is



that filmmakers in the Benin video-film segment of Nollywood should begin to make films in which women empowerment is seen clearly as “the process of building a woman’s capacity to be self-reliant and to develop her sense of inner strength” (Sara Longwe and Roy Clarke 1999, 1), not as we have observed at the beginning scenes of *Adaze*, and indeed perennially in the Benin society, where women are mainly portrayed as gossips, sex-hungry termagants, who would do anything to curry the favour of a ‘lord of the manor’ husband.

It is these kinds of tropes, which must be assertively contested by cultural and entertainment producers, that are prevalent in the larger Nigerian or African context, where many women are broken and dwarfed. In many instances, most of the homes are polygamous, so the women spend most of their lives having babies for their husbands and docilely following the scripts written by the spouses in frazzled relationships instead of living their own lives. In this regard, Chinyere Okunna (2002, par.3) opines that “gender relations in Nigeria are characterized by a lot of imbalance, to the disadvantage of women. This is the twenty-first century, yet tradition, culture, religion and other factors have continued to widen the disparity between Nigerian men and women, by keeping women in a subordinate position to men. The larger society and the male subculture still see women and their aspirations as subordinate, resulting in a situation in which the marginalization, trivialization and stereotyping of women are glaring aspects of Nigerian life.” In the same vein, Akachi Ezeigbo (1996, 5) argues that:

... as in other places, most women in Nigeria today are labouring and living under stress. The woman is often overwhelmed by the responsibilities in her

life – those created by the society and by herself. She is expected to perform her traditional role efficiently; run her home, be a good wife, a super-mother and a supportive member of the extended family. She is expected to contribute to the family income. And she must perform creditably at her job or business to be recognised or to make progress. And this impossible task she has to accomplish in a culture where she is taught that she is inferior to her male counterpart.

Agatha Ukata (2010a, 1; 2010b, 65) roundly condemns this seeming unfair treatment or representation of women in the Nigerian society as well as in Nollywood films. She contends that Nollywood videos such as *Omata Women* (2003), *I was Wrong* (2004), *More than a Woman 1 and 2* (2005), among others, typify women in very outrageous ways that try to feed on the stereotypes of women in Nigeria and by extension African societies. To her, the picture the videos give seem as though women have nothing good to contribute to the society other than destroying moral values, and engaging in petty quarrels.

It is likely similar grave concerns informed Ugor’s (2013, 158) re-examination of *Glamour Girls 1 and 2* (1994; 1996) in which women are categorized as never-do-wells and people of loose virtues, and as such, deprecated and relegated to the background in the decision-making processes in family or social affairs. Azeez (2013, 149), to a large extent, agrees with the above as he argues that the representations of women that are drawn from many Nollywood films stand for only a fraction of the reality of women’s lives, which is rather ideologically biased, hence, he stresses the need to challenge and

change the pattern of the representations of women in the films.

The point here is that Nollywood content creators, who in their own rights are both producers of cultural products and culture producers, should begin to consciously question such negative paradigms: the stress imposed on Nigerian women wherein the society relegates them to the background. The situation Okunna, Ezeigbo, Ukata and Ugor described in their separate studies significantly correlates with the lived experiences of women in Benin video-films such as *Enina* (dir. Eunice Omoregie 2012), *Isele* (dir. Loveday Amowie 2015), *Ikhuo-Erie 1 and 2* (dir. Kennedy Ikponmwosa 2016), *Evbaghakian 1 and 2* (dir. Ehis Agoba 2017), *Adaze*, and the larger Benin society. The chauvinistic and domineering attitudes of the males in the films mirror the societal expectation of men's role in real life situations in which "women are pulverised, weak and made helpless victims of male-dominated social arrangements" (interview with Peddie Okao, 25 October, 2016). Therefore, "for a woman to be empowered she has to be prepared for all forms of challenges; she has to know what she is actually struggling for" (Gladys I. Nwabah and Keri L. Heitner, 2009, 40). In this regard, it is edifying to note that at the end of *Adaze*, Iyengumwen's wives spoiled for a showdown when they could no longer put up with his lies and pseudo-macho manipulations.

It is, perhaps, in this connection that Akin Alao's (2011) advocacy for the local film industry (in Nigeria) to activate a considerable amount of attitudinal change favourable to women by attempting to set agenda or new roles for women in order for them to effectively play their part in the twenty first century development agenda, must be taken seriously. Content producers in the Benin video-film segment of Nollywood

must begin to make films which are directed at re-educating or reorienting both men and women in the geo-culture area towards a consciousness of complementarity of roles, which is healthy and developmental. For instance, screen scripts or films that explore the negotiation of domestic tasks, decision-making on family finances or any other project between husbands and wives and how these could reflect and help to improve the quality of life they live as well as that of the children would no doubt point towards some kind of balancing of roles and empowerment for women in the area. This is why I cannot agree more with the view that women's empowerment symbolizes "a more political and transformatory idea for struggles that challenges, not only patriarchy, but also the mediating structures of class, gender [...] ethnicity that determines the nature of women's position and condition in developing societies" (Srilatha Batliwala 2007, 558). And, of course, "the home video [Nollywood] industry in Nigeria [...], another institution that has continued to put women down" (Okunna 2002, par. 34), is one of the chief sites where the disempowerment of women should begin to be contested if the master-servant relations, including the observed disparities, inequities, and injustice concerning men and women in Benin society in particular and Nigeria in general must ebb away.

## Conclusion

In this study, I have examined the tropes of women disempowerment in *Adaze* (dir. Eunice Omoregie 2003), which is chiefly a filmic reflection of what happens in the Benin locality in Nigeria, but argued that filmmakers as change-makers or change-agents, have the responsibility to contest the negative socio-cultural practices against women in the Benin area and indeed across Africa through the instrumentality of films, with

a view to provide a more gender-friendly platforms for women to showcase their inner strengths and restricted skills for a more balanced development of society. I have also argued that although male chauvinism is a global scourge and not confined to Africa, its manifestations in Nigeria, particularly in the Benin area are very worrisome and require some kind of socio-cultural re-education or re-orientation efforts of well meaning civil groups, including gender sensitive nongovernmental organisations, Nollywood content creators, scholars, women themselves (who have been rather too quiet), the men, etc., to reduce its prevalence to the barest minimum.

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Mossy Business

Rebecca Matheson

## Spooky Stories at a Distance: Gender in Katherine Mansfield's Quantum Worlds

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### Abstract

Quantum theory has revolutionized all domains of human activity and knowledge during the last decades. Physicists agree nowadays that there are two different types of physics: “one for the bizarre subatomic world, where electrons can seemingly be in two places at the same time, and the other for the macroscopic world that we live in, which appears to obey the common sense laws of Newton” (Kaku 156). Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) was an avant-garde writer who revolutionized the modern short story during her lifetime, but a reading of gender in her short fiction from a quantum physicist perspective shows a dimension that goes far beyond mere time and space to reach a visionary cosmic direction in her subatomic fictional worlds. As a feminist writer, Mansfield challenged the male/female normative matrix of late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup> Century England. Following Albert Einstein's famous expression, this analysis reveals ‘spooky actions at a distance’ in Mansfield's narratives about gender. This paper analyses the author's fictional re/presentations of wo/men in time and space and explores the cosmic



dimension of Mansfield's writing by applying quantum theory to the Mansfieldian text (Barad 2007, Kaku 2005, Schäfer 2013, Westphal 2007).

**Keywords:** gender fluidity; quantum physics; space/time; subatomic world; visionary transformation



“Were we positive, eager, real — alive? No, we were not.

We were a nothingness shot with gleams of what might be”.

Katherine Mansfield. Letter to John Middleton Murry (11 October 1922)

“I, a universe of atoms, an atom in the universe”.

Richard Feynman

During the last decades, physicists have discovered a revolutionary new set of laws that have completely transformed our picture of the universe. The laws of quantum mechanics are redefining our understanding of reality. These new laws rule over every atom and tiny particle in every piece of matter. In stars and planets, in rocks and buildings and even in human beings, animals and plants. Atoms and the particles inside

them behave in a bizarre way that is completely different from macroscopic reality. One aspect of quantum reality is that “electrons in atoms are not particles, but standing waves, mathematical forms.” (Schaffer 2013). Moreover, in the quantum world, particles are not tied down to just one location and do not follow just one path. Albert Einstein called this bizarre behaviour “Spooky actions at a distance”. It is almost as if subatomic particles were in more than one place at a time. Quantum entanglement shows that there are invisible connections between particles even at huge distances in space and time, as physicist Graham Greene (2004) states:

Something that happens over here can be entangled with something that happens over there even if nothing travels from here to there and even if there isn't enough time for anything, even light, to travel between the events. This means that space cannot be thought of as it once was. Intervening space, regardless of how much there is, does not ensure that two objects are separate, since quantum mechanics allows an entanglement, a kind of connection, to exist between them. A particle, like one of the countless number that make up you or me, can run but it can't hide. According to quantum theory and the many experiments that bear out its predictions, the quantum connection between two particles can persist even if they are on opposite sides of the universe. From the standpoint of their entanglement, notwithstanding the many trillions of miles of space between them, it's as if they are right on top of each other. (Greene 79-80, my italics)



Katherine Mansfield was an avant-garde feminist writer who lived on the margins of time and space. Her life evolved between the last years of the 19th Century and the first two decades of the 20th Century. She was born in New Zealand in 1888, led her career in London, and died in France in 1923 at the age of 34. During her short but intense lifetime, Mansfield wrote some of the finest short stories in Modernist fiction. As a feminist woman writer in late Victorian patriarchal society, Mansfield's voice had to challenge the prevailing social structure and deep rooted fossilized ideologies that favoured male supremacy over female resigned submission. She used the power of words and literature as weapons to denounce abuses and distortions within the patriarchal society of her time, and did this in a subtle in/visible way. Mansfield's life experience led her to live in different countries and absorb the relative stability of often-opposed cultures. Her short stories represent individual experiences moving in and out of fictional and real spaces while alluding to the possibility of gender fluidity.

This paper explores four short stories taking place in various geographical settings. The first story entitled "The Woman at the Store" (1912) is set in the New Zealand arid desert. The events in "Bains Turcs" (1913) take place in a Turkish bath in Germany. In "Je ne parle pas français" (1918) the scenes evolve in Paris. Finally "Bliss" (1918) has no defined geographical location. Mansfield's stories depict the complexity and the relative stability of human emotions especially when it comes to bisexual and heterosexual relations. The argument presented in this paper shows how recent discoveries in quantum physics can present a scientific interpretation of Mansfield's artistic manifestations of gender fluidity. A new understanding of the very nature of subatomic particles explores Mansfield's

stories in particular and artistic creations in general from a different perspective. The varied settings highlight the influence of the authors' cultural diversity in shaping the fluid representation of gender identities.

As soon as we enter into the fictional world of "The Woman at the Store" our expectation concerning the title is blurred. The unnamed narrator is a woman who travels with two men, one of whom knows of an isolated store where the woman owner is told to sleep with passing travelers when her husband is away. The woman does not fit into any normative gender role and behaviour. The store, supposed to be a place of social and commercial exchange, is as deserted as its owner. Living alone with her little daughter in the rude New Zealand desert, the woman carries a rifle and behaves aggressively like a man "She stood, pleating the frills of her pinafore, and glancing from one to the other of us, like a hungry bird" (466). Far away from any civilized life, ethical and moral laws disappear and the woman abandoned by her husband quickly shows interest in having an intimate relationship with Jo, one of the travellers.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler challenges the assumptions about the distinction often made between sex and gender. According to Butler, sex is biological while gender is culturally constructed. For Butler, «women» are unfixed, confused categories, complicated by class, ethnicity, sexuality, and other facets of identity (Butler 12). Moreover, the universality presumed by these terms parallels the assumed universality of the patriarchal system as it prevailed during Mansfield's life time. In the anomic setting of "The Woman at the Store", the female protagonist acts like a man and challenges normative gender roles usually attributed to women. The three female characters in "The

Woman at the Store” have no names whereas the two male characters Jo and Hin are named. The main protagonist is always referred to as ‘the woman’, her six years old daughter is referred to as ‘the child’ or ‘the kid’ and we only learn that the first-person homodiegetic narrator (Genette 245) is a woman when the child uses the pronoun ‘her’ in reference to the narrator. Mansfield creates a fictional world where women are absent and present at the same time. As female characters in the story are not clearly identified, representation of space in “The Woman at the Store” is also confused and confusing. The whole story begins with the description of an endless and timeless desert but when the narrator describes the ‘large room’ in the woman’s dwelling, two time references suddenly appear in the fictional atmosphere of the story with the names of well-known 19th Century political figures : Queen Victoria and Richard Seddon thus transgressing the timeless imaginary world of the short story. Bertrand Wesphal considers transgressivity as related to the geocritical approach that defines “the fact that all appears to be continually moving on and that we can only catch a glimpse of reality for a short while.” (Wesphal, “Words making Worlds” Youtube min 31:00). The last words in the story further implement the fluid and moving dimension of space as well as the protagonist’s gender identity in Mansfield’s Narrative “A bend in the road, and the whole place disappeared.” (9)

The second story, “Bains Turc”, is set in a Turkish bath in Germany. It depicts a conflict between a couple of lesbian girls and a woman who is “vented in shocked prudery at the behaviour of the two blondes” (500). The unnamed narrator is clearly sympathetic with “the two fresh beauties who had never peeled potatoes and chosen the right meat” and reticent about the attitude of the “wretched figure of the little German

with a good husband and four children” (502) who aggressively condemns the behaviour of the two girls:

‘I’ve great mind to complain about those women as well. Those two that keep on laughing and eating. Do you know who they are?’ She shook her head. ‘They’re not respectable women – you can tell at a glance. At least I can, any married woman can. They’re nothing but a couple of street women. I’ve never been so insulted in my life. Laughing at me, mind you!’ (500-501)

“Bains Turcs” clearly satirises the status of married women in the patriarchal societies of Mansfield’s time through the arrogant and blind discourse of the German married woman (named ‘Mackintosh Cap’ by the narrator) who is not aware of the unconscious chains imposed upon her by social norms and habits. According to Butler, gender identities and roles come to exist because they are done or acted through repetition “Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms through which one is constituted” (1993:223). Butler argues, “[T]he act that one does, the act that one performs is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene” (1990:179). Mansfield condemns the idea of any fixed gender identity and even makes fun of the rigid characters who adhere to a fixed gendered matrix. By the end of “Bains Turcs”, the narrator reveals with sarcasm the hidden desire behind the married woman’s hostile attitude towards the two girls: “And as the two walked out of the ante-room, Mackintosh Cap stared after them, her sallow face all mouth and eyes, like the face of a hungry child before a forbidden table” (502). The purpose of Literature is to imagine different worlds, habits, attitudes and

to plunge the reader into the future of new realities. What doesn't exist in one specific space/time will sooner or later exist. Lesbian women were not supposed to exist during Mansfield's lifetime, but the very defying act of writing their presence made them exist and then persist.

The geographical setting of "Je ne parle pas français" is Paris. The protagonist Raoul Duquette is a French writer who falls in love with Dick, an English writer. This relationship between two men ends up when Dick abruptly announces that he will go back to England. Raoul, the autodiegetic narrator (Genette 248), exposes his reaction when he heard the bad news "I felt hurt. I felt like a woman must feel when a man takes out his watch and remembers an appointment that cannot possibly concern her, except that his claim is the stronger. 'Why didn't you tell me?'" (54). Months later, Raoul receives a letter from Dick announcing that he is coming back to Paris with a woman friend. Raoul quickly discovers that the woman is Dick's wife. She, too, is going to be deserted by her husband on the day of their arrival in Paris. Dick's homosexual relation with Raoul and his heterosexual relation with Mouse are blurring. Dick's unpredictable double betrayal leaves Raoul and his wife confused. Like atoms that make up our bodies, Dick appears and disappears without leaving notice. Every particle within our bodies tells us that we are not fixed creatures and that we evolve in a sea of random possibilities. In her stories, Mansfield presents characters who behave in spooky ways. Despite the supposedly fixed identities society imposes on us, human beings are unpredictable, there are always people who find a way of escape by acting differently.

Michio Kaku, professor in theoretical physics at the City University of New York

explains that there are two different types of physics: "One for the bizarre subatomic world, where electrons can seemingly be in two places at the same time, and the other for the macroscopic world that we live in, which appears to obey the common sense laws of Newton." (Kaku 156). In the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup>, electrons were thought to be particles, but recent discoveries in quantum mechanics demonstrated that electrons are actually waves, or can be both waves and particles at the same time. Observation at the subatomic level shows that an electron can be here or there and simply nowhere in between and that's nothing we experience in our everyday life. "Electrons, in fact, regularly dematerialize and find themselves rematerialized on the other side of walls inside the components of your PC and CD" (Kaku 147). Human beings, as well as every material and living being, are also made up of atoms, this bizarre unstable wavy behavior therefore also applies to us. We have a fundamental quantum nature but we can only observe it at the microscopic level and we cannot perceive it at the larger scale of the macroscopic level. Hence, the fixed rules and conventions of society defy our intrinsic fluid nature and impose on us the illusion of a finite reality<sup>1</sup>.

In "Bliss", Katherine Mansfield successfully captures moments of being as experienced by Bertha, a thirty-year-old woman who lives rare moments of self-discovery through her awakening to female desire and sexuality towards her friend Pearl. "Bliss" is one of Mansfield's most controversial stories of human relationships and the diversity of sexual desire. When Bertha experiences a moment of perfect communion with her female friend Pearl, she feels ready to share this experience with her husband Harry, whom she desires for the first time. However, she acciden-

1. Cf French physicist and philosopher Bernard d'Espagnat's concept of 'veiled realism'.

tally discovers that he is already engaged in an affair with her friend Pearl. Bertha is conscious that civilization is the cause of the inner tension triggered by the diversity of her desires, for its norms impedes bodies to be themselves: "How idiotic civilization is! Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare, rare fiddle?" (69).

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In *Undoing Gender*, Butler writes: The social norms that constitute our existence carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood. This matter is made more complex by the fact that the viability of our individual personhood is fundamentally dependent on these social norms. (...) As a result, the "I" that I am finds itself at once constituted by norms and dependent on them but also endeavors to live in ways that maintain a critical and transformative relation to them. (2-3)

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The four short stories presented in this paper present characters who act against the normative conventions prevalent in Mansfield's time. They depict lesbian and/or homosexual and the various geographical settings indicate that 'spooky actions' could appear any time anywhere thus transcending the socio-cultural logic of the space/time in which the stories were produced. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler defines gender performativity as "The stylised repetition of acts through time" (271). In *Undoing Gender*, Butler even asks the question "Have we ever yet known the human? (...) If we take the field of the human for granted, then we fail to think critically and ethically about the consequential

ways that the human is being produced, reproduced and deproduced" (36). In her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, physicist and professor of feminist studies and philosophy Karen Barad considers that "[e]xistence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating" (ix). As opposed to 'interaction', where two bodies interact and maintain a level of independence, Barad considers that individuals materialize through 'intra-action' and their ability to act emerges from within the relationship not outside of it. Classical Newtonian physics which "identified separated beings and absolute differences between particles and waves, space and time" (Stark 2017) was one of the guiding principles that helped Western imperialism to emerge. But Quantum mechanics shows a different reality. Identity formation, coming into being, in order to things and bodies to materialize, there must be a constant reformulation of what is already present inside connected and entangled fields of energy. Gender identities are equally constructed as part of intra-related dis-continuities. We are made of quantum particles, our thoughts and actions therefore inexorably quantomize our reality. For Barad, then, "quantum weirdness is actually quantum queerness" (Youtube, min 27:00):

Phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is composed not of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but of things-in-phenomena. The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization in the enactment of determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies. This ongoing



flow of agency through which part of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another part of the world and through which causal structures are stabilized and destabilized does not take place in space and time but happens in the making of space-time itself. It is through specific agential intra actions that a differential sense of being is enacted in the ongoing ebb and flow of agency. That is, it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter-in both senses of the word. (Barad 140)

By challenging the heterosexual patriarchal norms prevalent during her lifetime, Mansfield's stories depict characters who behave in spooky ways and transcends the socio-cultural 'logic' of the space/time in which the stories were produced. The ultimate goal of all creative art is therefore to transgress the classical limited and finite Newtonian material representation of space and time, and to enter into the limitless quantum dimension of infinite transmuting potentialities. What we call imagination and creativity are nothing but natural quantum phenomena. Katherine Mansfield's narratives are a fine example of how artistic manifestations can transgress rigid normative ideologies and how art can become intemporal by revealing the quantum nature of gender identities. Her narratives preceded the epoch and the space, as Wesphal puts it "the text precedes the place, and sometimes seems to anticipate its discovery" (158).

The world of quantum physics, like our inner world, is a world of infinite possibilities with no limited or fixed boundaries. Recent discoveries on the nature of consciousness show that our imagination, our faculty to create images in our mind, has the power to create reality. The world of artistic creation with its marginal writers; painters, musicians,

a James Joyce, a Vincent Van Gogh, a Claude Debussy who defied the norms prevalent during their lifetime, is the world that best depicts our inner quantum reality and therefore acts consequently by generating artists whose 'spooky' cre-a(c)tions could only be really understood and appreciated decades after their production.

There has to be somewhere else, I tell myself. And everyone knows that to go somewhere else there are routes, 'signs', maps – for an exploration, a trip That's what books are. Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce a system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds. (Cixous )

Knowing about the weird activities of invisible particles opens the way to a new understanding of the nature of the symbolic, artistic and imaginative phenomena of the human mind to reach new visions about the potentialities of a cosmic consciousness (Schäfer 2013, 2014). Moreover the quantum principles of entanglement and nonlocality<sup>2</sup> pave the way to an infinite range of thought provoking philosophical explorations of space, time, and the nature of reality (d'Espagnat 2012). In the conferences of renowned scientists Lothar Schäfer and Bernard d'Espagnat, both of them ended up by relating

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2. Entanglement and nonlocality - Menas Kafatos. Youtube, September 12, 2014. [accessed 16/12/2017] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4w7Vp-Ws9Iw>.

quantum manifestations to artistic creations. The future of the Humanities in general and the Arts in particular is definitely quantum oriented.

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## Good Morning America

Joe DeMare

Bowling Green, Ohio

“What a loser,” Paul said to the television.

The pretty morning show host, Kate Partridge, continued as if he had said nothing, of course. She was interviewing a rather tall, gaunt man who was standing behind the waist high barricades, holding up a sign reading, “I Love You, RACHEL!” in gold glitter paint. “How long have you two been together?” she asked. She had to shout to be heard over the cheering, waving crowd pressing in on the man. Many had signs of their own that said things like “Happy Fiftieth Richard!” or “Spartans Rule!” They bumped and jostled each other for a moment in front of the camera.

“Fifteen years!” he yelled into the proffered microphone, “But she...” the microphone was suddenly pulled away as the hostess turned to face the camera, the brightness of her teeth rivaling that of her not-too-short yellow dress.

“Isn’t that sweet?” Kate asked her co-hosts and the rest of America, “And when we come back, we’re going to give you your complete weather forecast. Then it’s a look at the history of the bikini.”

Paul dunked another half piece of toast in his morning coffee. The trick was to get the toast as saturated as possible without having it break off in the cup or on the journey from the coffee table to mouth. Over the years, he had gotten pretty skilled and was almost always rewarded by the sweet buttery bitter taste, though occasional accidents were inevitable. He watched the now muted TV screen as grossly inflated cartoon animals floated across virtual skies attempting to persuade him to change his car insurance company.

For some reason, the tall man with the sign irritated him. Where was Rachel? Why was that guy there alone? He had looked a little seedy, a little raggedy around the edges. Maybe they had broken up. Maybe the whole thing, the sign, getting on national TV, was a desperate ploy to get her back. “What a loser,” he said again--this time to his apartment in general.

Paul had known a girl named Rachel once. She was his third or fourth girlfriend after college. She had long red hair and was just a tiny bit overweight. They had gone together for eight months. It was during that time that he had been promoted to assistant director of the billing department. They liked each other well enough, but after eight months, they both found themselves attracted to other people and had parted “amicably.” What was that other girl’s name? Ellen? Susan? Gretchen? Anyway, it never worked out and he started getting very busy with his new position.



He smiled, carrying the empty coffee cup to the kitchen sink, remembering the promotions and the quick rise up the corporate ladder to the head of the billing division. Division head before 30--that was really something. Then came the decision to move all the billing to Mexico. On his way back to the couch, he stopped and looked again at the thank-you card from Alejandro, the man he had trained to take over his own job. Of course, he hadn't known that at the time. His boss, the vice president, had assured him that after the restructuring Paul would be brought to the national headquarters. That was a lie. He had been fired without so much as a 'thank you' card from the company. Paul's only solace was that shortly afterward, the vice president was also 'right sized' out of his job. Alejandro's card said "Muchas Gracias" in his spidery handwriting. He had paper-clipped to it a picture of himself and his family waving at the camera. By now, the paper clip was getting rusty and Paul wondered again why he kept that card displayed so prominently on his apartment's mantle.

He had to sit through three more commercial breaks and two more weather reports before the promised history of the bikini. It was a disappointment. First of all, they never mentioned the nuclear weapons tests of the nineteen fifties. He happened to know that women started wearing bikinis because, when H-bombs were being set off every week, they thought the world was about to end and modesty didn't matter any more. The nuclear bombs that destroyed the bikini atoll changed women's fashion forever. Also, the models they used were all too skinny. To Paul, they looked like fifteen year olds. Now, Rachel had filled out her bikini very nicely... Somewhere he had a picture of her he had taken while they were on a vacation to Myrtle Beach. Briefly, he

thought about calling her again. He imagined how a 'get in touch' phone call would go up to the point where she would invariably ask what he was doing now. He would have to answer "nothing." He dropped the idea.

The end credits started to roll for the morning show. As usual, he got out the list of things to do that he had made the night before. He hovered over the list with a felt tipped marker. He checked off 'eat Breakfast' and 'watch morning show.' He paused over the 'Buy new dress shirt.' That could perhaps wait until he had an actual job interview scheduled. Paul went to his computer and checked his checking account balance. He scrolled down past the automatic withdrawals for his car payment and health insurance, came to his current balance and stopped. \$9,850.57. That was all that was left from the sale of his condo, less than three months of living expenses. He stared at the number for a long time. Suddenly, he put an "X" through his entire list, got up and walked out of his apartment into the bright June sunlight.

He didn't know where he was going but he held his back straight and marched quickly down the road. Something had to give: Something had to change.

He walked past the seemingly endless strings of pizza and hamburger franchise stores surrounding his apartment complex. The hamburger businesses were open and their drive in window lines were packed with SUV's and vans, each with a single driver, each trying to gulp down a little sugar starch meat and caffeine before going on to wherever they were going. Through the glare of the rising sun reflected off the sides of their cars, the drivers turned to look at Paul through sunglasses or tinted windows. He realized with a start that he had stopped and was staring at the line of cars. He started

walking again.

Now he was walking through a part of the city which was not nearly as ‘nice.’ The fast food places were strung out, sometimes two or three blocks apart. As he passed a McDonald’s he noticed that the yellow of the giant ‘M’ was exactly the same shade of yellow as the dress that Kate, the morning show host had worn earlier. Was that a sign, he wondered, or a coincidence, or maybe even subliminal advertising. Between the isolated restaurants, there were: empty store fronts; abandoned auto repair places; craft shops; and pet grooming stores. Some had dusty “We Have Moved” signs in the window. Most were simply quietly crumbling. His legs had started to ache. How long had he been walking? Two hours? Four? He turned the corner and found himself face to face with the Greyhound bus station. Six of the huge buses sat idling, adding another layer of diesel soot to the grey concrete walls of the bus bays. He walked past the buses, catching a whiff of sickly sweet disinfectant. Ignoring the “DO NOT USE THIS ENTRANCE” sign, he entered the bus terminal.

The huge ceilings, rumbling air ducts and shifting shadows in the Buffalo terminal gave the impression of bustling activity, but the dozen or so people scattered among the hundreds of hard, plastic seats were anything but animated. Slouching morosely, they seemed to be immobilized by the many layers of clothes they wore. Sweaters on top of hooded sweatshirts, underneath ragged, dark jackets made them look as if they were wearing everything they owned, and perhaps some were.

The ticket counter was hiding away at one end of the terminal. The overweight man behind the three inch thick glass certainly wasn’t in any hurry to reveal himself from

behind his desk as Paul tapped on the scratched and clouded glass. “Excuse me...” The man behind the glass looked up but said nothing. “How much for a ticket to New York City?”

“Sixty-five dollars.”

“And when’s the next bus out?”

“There’s one leaving in about five minutes. After that, the next one is in twelve hours.” Paul was taken aback. Somehow he had anticipated that there would be a long wait for the next bus--that he could find a restaurant, drink coffee and think about his next move. Move towards what? Why was he here? What was he doing? Suddenly, he felt sweat pouring out of every pore in his body. He anxiously glanced around the terminal and noticed several of the sitting people staring at him with some interest.

“One please.” Paul said to the man. Once he had made his decision, he felt calm, just as quickly as he had felt anxious. As his debit card was swiped, he thought ‘\$9,875.57.’

“Gate 8A. You’d better hurry, Sam likes to leave early, he’s got a girlfriend in New York.”

“It’s been a pleasure talking with you.” Paul had meant to say it sarcastically, but he suddenly realized it was true. Running back through the terminal, he imagined the heads of the overly clothed people turning to follow him. Back out through the door he had come in (the other side was much more polite. It said, “Thank you for riding with us.”) he saw a bus stopped at the edge of the parking lot with its left turn signal

blinking, waiting for a break in traffic. Really sprinting for the first time in years, Paul suddenly had a flash of memory. He remembered running down a hillside at Chestnut Ridge park, arms back like a swept-wing fighter and for the merest fraction of a second, felt the same weightlessness he had felt as a child. Then he was banging on the bus door with both hands. “Sam! Sam! Let me in,” Sam opened the bus door, scowling slightly.

“Do I know you?” Sam asked, as he took Paul’s ticket.

“No, the man at the ticket counter told me your name.”

“Oh, that’s Jim for you. He’d call your wife and tell her when it was your girlfriend’s birthday just to see what would happen. That man just has to tell everybody everything. Well, there’s some empty seats towards the back.”

Paul made his way towards the back of the bus, touching the slightly oily seat covers for support. He noticed several young mothers with small children. The excited kids were talking loudly, pointing out every truck and police car. It was clear that they felt the whole experience was some kind of magical adventure. There were some of the raggedy looking people from inside the terminal, some college students plugged into I-pods with their eyes closed and one business man in a suit and tie, typing away furiously on a laptop. When the bus pulled sharply into the traffic, Paul found himself having to grab onto the luggage shelf, hanging over a pleasant looking middle aged woman. For a few seconds, it was all he could do to keep from falling across her lap. When the bus straightened, Paul was able to stand up. “Sorry...” he said, embarrassed. She gave a small smile, but said nothing.

Towards the back, as promised, he found two empty seats next to each other. He sat down with his back to the window, putting his feet on the empty seat. ‘Now,’ he thought to himself, ‘now I can finally figure out what I’m doing.’ To his great surprise, he promptly fell asleep. When he woke up, his first sensation was thirst. “Rachel?” he rasped. Then he opened his eyes and faced a moment bordering on panic as his mind tried to make sense of the lumpy shapes of the bus seats, the glare from the windows, and the pains in his stiff legs and back. He closed his eyes, shook his head, and the memories fell into place one by one. Paul stood up and looked around, the bus was empty except for Sam who was standing at the front, cleaning his sunglasses with his shirt.

“You’d better get a move on,” Sam called back, “This is just a 15 minute stop.” Staggering slightly, Paul made his way through the empty bus and out into the bright sun washed concrete of the Syracuse terminal. After paying \$2 for a 6 ounce bottle of plastic flavored water, Paul began pacing up and down inside the terminal. It was very different from the cavernous Buffalo terminal. Here, plastic orange chairs were spaced around square white tables. These tables were squeezed into a narrow corridor between a row of vending machines on one side and the outside wall on the other. Claustrophobia was avoided, however, because the outer wall was all glass so that the bus riders sitting at the tables could contemplate both the parking lot and the antiquated brick buildings of downtown Syracuse beyond. Paul thought it was silly to go right from the seats on the bus to the chairs in the terminal, so as he drank his bottled water, he strode up and down past his traveling companions. They were all chatting amicably with each other and eating snacks like barbecue flavored potato chips which came in either tiny bags they

had purchased from the vending machines, or large economy sized bags they had carried in from the bus.

On his fourth sashay past the tables, Paul was surprised by an empty chair skidding out in front of him. “Have a seat,” said the man in the business suit, “You’re making me dizzy.” Paul stood awkwardly for a moment, then sat down at the table.

“Chips? They’re barbecue.” The woman he had almost fallen upon was sitting to his right. She pushed the large open bag towards him.

“Thanks,” Paul replied, reaching in. He suddenly realized he had eaten nothing for hours. The salty chips tasted delicious, but he’d be thirsty again in minutes. That would mean a second bottle of water...\$9,781.57.

“So, why are you headed for the City?” asked the business man, “Job interview?”

“Yes,” Paul lied quickly and easily. “I haven’t worked in a while.”

“Then why don’t you have any luggage?” asked the woman.

“Easiest thing in the world,” the businessman jumped in as Paul stared blankly at her. “You don’t bring clothes into New York City. They have the best tailors in the world. If you want a really nice suit, tailored just to you so that you’ll look really sharp at your interview, you buy a brand new suit in the City. Am I right?” Paul nodded.

“Oh, I see... My name is Janice by the way.”

“Bill Richardson.”

“Paul.” Paul shook Bill’s confidently proffered hand, turned to Janice and they clasped hands briefly. “So, Janice, What brings you to New York City?”

“My sister. She’s editor of a magazine and she lives by herself. But, because she’s working all the time, her apartment’s a pig sty. Every six months or so I use up a little vacation time and surprise her. I clean up her apartment, do some cooking, freeze a bunch of food. She takes me to a fancy Manhattan restaurant and maybe see a show. Then it’s back home to Buffalo.”

“You clean your sister’s apartment?”

“Oh, I don’t mind. I get out a little, after all. My idiot husband dumped me for a twenty-something five years ago. Our son is out of the house, almost done with college. At least my Ex is still paying for that, But I had to get a job and sell the house. So, it’s just me, and I refuse to get a cat!”

“Your husband left you,” Paul said, “Then he IS an idiot. If you’ve got someone good in your life, you hang on to them with everything you’ve got. You don’t dump them because you think someone else might be better. That’s my motto.”

“Oh, and do you have someone good in your life, now?” Janice asked.

“Well, heh, that’s my motto now. It wasn’t always my motto.”

“Uh-HUH.” said Janice.

“Don’t drink and drive. That’s my motto,” said Bill. “Three DUI’s and they took my license. So, now I cover my territory by bus. Turned out to be a great thing,



though. I can get lots of work done, and with wireless e-mail, all the paperwork is done before I arrive. So all I have to do is take the client to dinner, catch a ball game, and head back home again.”

The terminal’s loudspeakers suddenly assaulted them with a harsh voice that Paul couldn’t understand. But, everyone else started pushing their chairs back and standing up. Soon he was back on the bus, sipping his second bottle of water and watching the rural countryside slide by. Again he wondered what he was doing. Why had he plucked himself out of his life like that? No one even knew he was gone. He could call his mother, but he had left his cell phone on its charger in the kitchen. As he watched the trees streaming past the window, he started playing a little mental game he had played as a child. He imagined himself in the scenery: pushing through bushes; jumping or wading the creeks; wearing a backpack with a wooden walking stick. He kept playing the game until the evening fell and Sam turned on the bus’s inside lights. Paul suddenly found himself looking at himself as the darkened windows became mirrors.

The reflection was so clear that it felt to Paul as if he were watching a long, mood-setting scene in a detective show. But, if he was an extra, where was the star? The businessman? Paul scanned the window and saw him reflected, bathed in the pale light from his laptop computer screen, laughing. ‘Probably reading jokes on his e-mail’ Paul thought--a sure sign of an extra. No, it’s not him. The divorced woman? Her reflection seemed to be sleeping. Probably not the star of the show. His gaze settled back on himself. Perhaps he was the star after all. Maybe this wasn’t some sort of crime show, but a P.O.V. public television vignette sort of thing. Paul yawned and fell asleep.

This time he was woken up by Janice gently shaking his shoulder. “I wasn’t going to leave you asleep this time. The bus driver’s already gone. You could’ve woken up in Florida.”

“Thanks.” Paul smiled, embarrassed. “Are you going to your sister’s now?”

“She’s already here,” Janice nodded out the window. Paul turned and saw a short, thin woman with glasses and curly hair. Everything about her radiated energy and intensity, even the short, quick waves she was aiming at her sister.

“Janice! Come on, let’s go!” her voice pierced the bus windows.

“Are you going to be okay?” Janice asked Paul.

“ I think so, thanks again.”

“Well...See you.”

The hustle and bustle in Grand Central Station was no illusion. The overly clad people were there, but they were banished to dark corners and edges. Everyone else was in a hurry, heading somewhere fast. This time, Paul’s resolve faltered. He looked around the station, not sure what to do next. A brightly lit wall of telephone handsets caught his attention. He walked over to it and saw that it was covered with ads for different hotels. He recognized a Marriot that he had stayed at once for a conference. He picked up the phone and a cool, professional voice directed him to a van that brought him to a walnut panelled lobby.

After the details of check in were completed (\$9,400 left even with a AAA

discount), Paul asked the young man behind the counter if there was anyplace he could buy art supplies.

“Big presentation tomorrow, huh?”

“Something like that.”

“Well, there’s a little convenience store in the basement level. They have markers and poster board. I hope that’s enough.”

Twenty minutes later and \$40 poorer, Paul burst into his hotel room with an arm full of art supplies and snacks. Laying everything out on one of the two beds, he started to work. Somewhere around 2 in the morning, he accessed the internet through the hotel’s service on his television set. After giving up his name, e-mail address, and \$3.00, he managed to get on a website that offered “free” tickets to New York shows. Another hour and quite a bit of personal information later, he secured a ticket for the morning after next. He fell asleep sitting up on his bed with the keyboard across his lap.

He woke up the next day just before noon, still in the clothes he had worn the day before. He was laying, sprawled, on top of the keyboard. His head was near the foot of the bed and he looked up to see “Error 404: File not Found” glaring at him from the TV screen. Rubbing his eyes, he looked around at the mess he had made of the room. Doubt again assailed him. What was the point of this plan? He should get right back on the bus and head home while he still had some money left. Then his eyes fell upon the poster he had made the night before. It was beautiful.

In high school, he had won the annual art show three times. His grades were

poor because he worked so slowly that most of his assignments were late. He felt that his pictures had to be perfect, and this poster very nearly was. He had used everything he could remember about shading and contrast to create depth. The letters seemed to leap off of the paper. He was sure they’d look great on TV.

Now for the suit. He took a long shower, then rinsed his underwear in the sink. Alternating between the microwave and the hair dryer, he managed to get them dry in about 20 minutes. The rest of his clothes still smelled of bus, but they would have to do. He went down to the lobby and had a long talk with the concierge. With directions to a tailor in his pocket, he burst out onto the streets of New York.

He had forgotten, if he had ever really known, just how purposeful everyone looked. They all seemed to be in a competition over who was busier, who was locked into a more urgent conversation. He saw a man and a woman walking together, each having a frenetic conversation through the bluetooth plugged in their ears and periodically turning to ask each other questions about pricing or delivery times. Lunch was two hot dogs with sauerkraut, relish and ketchup bought from a man with a silver sided cart shaded by a red and white umbrella. He tried to share in the spirit of the City by eating them while walking briskly to the tailor’s, but the resulting ketchup and sauerkraut stains down the front of his shirt looked distinctly unsophisticated.

However, the stains did nothing to dampen the enthusiasm of the short, grey haired tailor. Joe, of ‘Joe’s One Hour Tailors’ greeted Paul like a long lost friend. “You must be Paul!” Joe almost shouted, grasping Paul’s hand with both hands and pumping it vigorously, “John called and said you were coming! Job interview, hey? That’s great!

What do you do, Paul?” Joe was suddenly perfectly still, gazing at Paul with laser-like intensity.

“Uhhh..accounts receivable. I was division head at AP Parts.”

“Wow! That’s great!” Joe was again all animation and excitement. “I used to buy all my mufflers from them back when I had a car. But, who needs cars when you live in the City? Where do you live, Paul?” Alternating between almost crazed volubility and intense listening, Joe plied Paul with questions that Paul could not fathom had anything to do with buying a suit. As they were talking, Joe led Paul back to a small room filled with half-finished suits and bolts of expensive fabric. He took Paul’s measurements and then stood, tapping hi lips with his index finger, regarding Joe speculatively.

“Aren’t you going to write down my measurements?”

“What? Oh no, it’s all up here,” Joe tapped his temple. “You call me up from Buffalo six months from now, I hear your voice, you tell me your name and I can make you another suit, exactly the same. Call me up a year from now...and well a lot can happen in a year...” Joe patted his belly, “I might need to measure you again. But I’ll remember you and remember what I sold you. Now I think I have the suit for you.” As he said this last, Joe’s tone took on an incredulous note, as if there were some fantastic coincidence occurring. Ducking into a back room he emerged with a light grey suit on a hanger. He held the hanger in one hand and draped the suit over the other arm precisely the way a knight presents his sword to a king. Joe stood expectantly before Paul in this position, waiting. Unsure of what to do next, Paul took a tiny corner of the pant leg and

rubbed it between his thumb and forefinger.

“Feels nice...” he said.

“It should, this is an Italian suit. You’ll notice that the fabric is not very heavy, but it has wool in it so you can wear it in summer. However, it will still keep you warm during those Buffalo winters. You look good in this color and notice the collar. Button the dress shirt, put on a tie and this looks like a very conservative suit, but with no tie, the collar opens up a little. This is now something you can wear out to a bar, maybe even on the dance floor, huh?”

Paul couldn’t help but smile. Part of him wanted to ask the price. Another part, which unexpectedly took over, simply said, “I’ll take it.”

“Come back in an hour.”

One hour and ten minutes later, Paul stepped out onto the street with a new suit in its protective plastic cover slung over his shoulder. Now his feeling of purposelessness was gone. He had a brand new, hand tailored suit. It must have been obvious to anyone watching him that he had places to go, important things to decide. Savoring this source of surety, he decided to walk about the city a bit, pausing in front of expensive stores and regarding their displays seriously as if he might want to buy some \$400 shoes to go with his suit or a \$4,000 diamond bracelet for a fiancée back home. He found himself on the 100 block of West 51st street, walking behind two women. One was talking at a blistering pace and kept trying to hurry the other along, getting a few steps ahead of her very quickly then having to turn back and wait. But the second

woman maintained a calm, steady pace, responding with five words for every twenty the first woman blurted out. It suddenly occurred to Paul that he knew them.

“Janice?” he asked, tapping the slower woman on the shoulder.

“Oh look, it’s Paul,” said Janice turning and smiling but continuing to walk.

“And you got your suit. It looks good.”

“Paul from the bus?” asked the other woman, “My sister hasn’t stopped talking about you since she arrived.”

“Sara!” Janice blushed and Paul felt the same quickening of his pulse that he remembered from his teens and twenties. It had been a long time.

“We’d love to stop and chat, but we’ve got reservations at Spago’s. Do you want to come with us?”

“Oh no,” said Paul, I’ve still got to get ready for my interview.”

“Oh, when is it?” asked Janice.

Paul almost started his next sentence with “Oh” but he caught himself. Instead he just said “First thing in the morning.”

“Then you’re going back to Buffalo?”

“Yes, I guess I’ll catch the evening bus.” They had arrived in front of Spago’s and stopped, facing each other.

“Well, good luck.” Janice gave a quick, embarrassed smile and the two women

walked into the restaurant.

The electronic screeching of his hotel phone woke Paul up at 3:30 the next morning. He showered and then put on his new suit without a tie. It fit him perfectly, as far as he could tell. He decided to take a cab to the studio to protect his sign. The cab ride was \$22, with tip. He started to do the math to figure exactly how much money he had left, but then he realized that he had lost track and had absolutely no idea. The realization left him standing there in the pre-dawn chill, confused. Suddenly a van pulled up and about a dozen rail thin high school girls tumbled out and started running towards the illuminated area where crews were setting up cameras and putting the waist high barricades into place. Paul surmised from their signs and loud, excited conversation that the girls were the Wasilla, Alaska high school volleyball team, come to New York to compete in the Nationals. He was worried for a minute that the girls would hog the camera and that he would have to push through them to get on the air. But, when they reached the barricades, they positioned themselves directly in front of the camera. Paul smiled. He knew that the best place to stand to get interviewed was about 7 feet to the right. He took up his post and waited.

The glare from the camera lights at first made it impossible to see anything but the other people in the front rows and a patch of asphalt about 15 feet across. Then, as the sun slowly rose, he began to see the grey sky and the dark skyscrapers around them. More and more people were coming. Vans, taxis, and buses would pull up and people would pile out--middle aged people squealing and running the same as the school children. A man wearing headphones called for their attention. Then, shouting, he



told them all what they could and could not say, pointed out the “applause” sign and had them do a few practice cheers. Then someone spotted one of the hosts, and they all cheered again.

Finally, it was time. From the front row, Paul could see the same monitors that the hosts could see. He watched as the opening credits ran and the studio hosts began their morning banter. Kate Partridge took up her position in front of the volleyball team, holding her microphone in one hand, the other hand was on her ear that held her earpiece where she was getting some last minute instruction from the director. From the back, Paul could see the transmitter that was belted onto her lower back and the spiraling, black cord that ran up from it and then disappeared under her hair. Then more lights blazed upon them and the ‘applause’ sign started flashing. The cheering was deafening. Paul was waving his sign as Ms. Partridge suddenly started talking to the camera as if it were a person.

“Thank you, Keith. We’ve got a really enthusiastic crowd here today!” They all yelled even louder. She took a few steps towards Paul. “And here’s someone who obviously took some time on his sign. ‘I love you, Kate!’ That’s my name, you know. Is she your girlfriend?” Here it was, the microphone was before his face and the lights and camera aimed directly at him.

“Actually, she doesn’t even know I exist.” he replied.

Looking confused, Kate asked, “So are you hoping that she will notice you by getting on TV?”

Paul just smiled and after a one second pause, Kate turned back to the camera and said, “Well, ladies, if you want to get noticed, you need to stick around for the last segment on our look at the history of women’s fashion. We’ll take a close look at the mini-skirt. Next up is your complete weather forecast.”

The lights went out, Kate Partridge walked away from the crowd, back towards the camera and Paul allowed himself to be bumped and jostled to the back of the crowd. He stayed through the rest of the show, stayed for a while even after the square had cleared out and the television crew had gone. Then he dumped his sign into a wire trash bin alongside others (“Bulldogs Rule!” “Happy 97th, Grandma”) and walked slowly down the block, looking for a subway entrance.

He checked out of his hotel without even glancing at the final bill, ate lunch at a diner where he paid three times what he would have paid for a hamburger with some chips in Buffalo, and wandered the streets, wearing his new suit and carrying his old clothes and the remaining art supplies in the white plastic bags he had gotten from the convenience store.

Evening found him sitting in the bus terminal, waiting alongside the bulkily dressed, the mothers with children in tow and the college kids. He was trying to wrap his mind around what had happened. For about 30 seconds, he had been before the eyes of 20 million people. No one in his family had ever done anything remotely like that. He wondered briefly if his mother had been watching. No, she never watched the morning shows. Did anyone recognize him? Did it matter? He was still wondering as he shuffled onto the bus and took a window seat, the bags with his clothes still clutched in his lap.

He was startled as a middle-aged woman tossed herself into the seat next to his. He was even more startled to see that it was Janice.

“I was hoping you would notice me.” She said in a slightly accusatory tone. “I was sitting in just the perfect spot for you to turn your head a little and see me, but you just kept staring off into space.”

“I’m sorry...”

“Don’t be. I guess I am a little old for that kind of game,” she said, sighing, “I saw you on TV. Who’s Kate?”

Paul looked at her for a long moment before answering. “You know what? I don’t ever want to talk about Kate again. I can finally say that I’m over her.” Janice smiled. “Why are you on this bus? I thought you were staying at your sister’s through the weekend?”

“I cleaned her dishes, did her laundry, vacuumed the living room and straightened up her DVD collection. She can hire somebody to do the bathroom. But do you really not know why I’m here?”

Slowly, Paul worked it out. “You knew when I was leaving because you asked me...” Janice smiled again, and this time Paul did, too. Somewhere around Albany, she fell asleep with her head on his shoulder. He didn’t mind a bit.

When he arrived back at his apartment, the television was still on. He turned it off by unplugging it. Then he went out to his garage and brought in the box it had

come in. He had saved every bit of the original packaging, even the black twist-ties that bundled the cords together. He meticulously packed the television away, then went to his internet computer. Within an hour, he had auctioned it off for \$400. As he was getting ready to take the TV to the post office, he checked his phone. It had 22 messages. Apparently people he knew must have seen him on TV after all. He decided to sit down and make a new list of things to do before he left the house. First, he wrote down, then checked off “Get on National Television.” Next he wrote “Answer Phone Messages.” Finally he wrote, “Dinner with Janice.”





Texture #1

Rebecca Matheson

**From Rural to Urban Community:  
Historicizing Colonial Legacy, Indigenous Ini-  
tiatives and the Transformation  
of Ikorodu Metropolis, Lagos, 1894-1999**

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**Abstract**

The enduring impact of colonial administration and indigenous initiatives, as well as the phenomenon of migration and settlement patterns, have been one of the most important factors influencing urbanization and the transformation of Ikorodu metropolis of Lagos. Indeed, colonial legacy and the increase in migrant settlers in Ikorodu, occasioned by a combination of socio-political and economic activities of the various Nigerian groups that settled in Ikorodu, have gradually and steadily contributed to the transformation of the metropolis from a mere farmland and fishing centre of the early twentieth century

to an enviable city of tremendous opportunities. It is against this background that this article examines the nature, pattern and impact of colonial, post-colonial and how development and proximity of Ikorodu to Lagos contributed toward the transformation of the area. Building on the existing literature, this article presents fresh perspective on the transformation of city, which has been largely neglected on the historiography of Lagos while adopting the distinctive historical research methodology and using a style of presentation is both descriptive and analytical. It also analyses the challenges militating against total and effective transformation of Ikorodu during this period. This paper maintains that the colonial legacy was a precursor to the transformation of Ikorodu and concludes with some recommendations regarding effective collaboration between government and private initiatives to address inadequate infrastructures in order to sustain the progress already achieved in this area of Lagos.

**Keywords:** Colonial legacy, migration, urban, transformation

## Introduction

Transformation refers to a change in something. It may also mean qualitative change; a marked change in size or character, especially one for the better. Cities and their environments all over the world are continuously changing. This process has, in many respects, over the years, led to the transformation of areas that were “pepper farms” into urban centres. This fittingly illustrates the history of Ikorodu, a city that lies on the Lagos Lagoon, Bight of Benin, northeast of Lagos State, Nigeria, which is the focus of this paper. Some work has been done on the history of Ikorodu but its primary focus has been on the tradition of origin, the Bini conquest, the British conquest, annexation as well as the administrations of Ikorodu during the colonial period as evident particularly in

Tunde Oduwobi's <sup>1</sup> Babatunde Agiri<sup>2</sup> and Boge Faruq<sup>3</sup> whose periods terminate in 1960 respectively. This paper focuses on the impact of colonial legacy, indigenous initiatives as well as socio-economic and political factors that foster the transformation of Ikorodu which have been generally neglected on the existing literature of Lagos as the fastest growing urban centre in Africa. Building on the existing works though, this attempt is an advance on them in terms of scope, methodology and focus. Furthermore, the story of transformation of Ikorodu is worth telling within the wider narrative of Lagos because, Ikorodu has become one of the most attractive and expanded parts of the five divisions that made up modern Lagos State.

Geographically, Ikorodu is bounded in the north by the Sagamu Local Government Area of Ogun State, in the west and east by Kosofe and Epe Local Government Areas of Lagos State respectively. The town stretches from Gbasemo (Aga) and Oriya in the south to Agbala/Itokin road in the north. The Majidun River also bound it in the west and in the east by a straight line that connects Itamaga to Igbogbo-Ipakodo road. Ikorodu Local Government has been consistent since the creation of Lagos State in 1967. Attempt at splitting Ikorodu into six Local Government areas in 2003 under the administration of Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu could not materialize, as the exercise was declared inchoate, null and void by the Supreme Court of Nigeria, which compelled the Lagos Government to revert Ikorodu to a single Local Government Area.<sup>4</sup>

1. Tunde Oduwobi, *Ijebu under Colonial Rule 1892-1960: An Administrative and Political Analysis* (Lagos: First Academic Publishers, 2004).

2. Babatunde Agiri, “Lagos-Ikorodu Relations 1894 – 1950”, in *History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, eds. Ade Adefuye, Babatunde Agiri and Jide Osuntokun (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1987), 204-21.

3. Faruq Idowu Boge, “An Administration History of Ikorodu, 1894- 1960,” *Lagos Historical Review* 14 (2014): 135-150.

4. Boge, “Administration History of Ikorodu,” 136.



The transformation of Ikorodu as an urban area within the bigger narratives of Lagos can be traced back to 1894 when the territory was annexed by the British colonial government in Lagos as part of the Lagos colony.<sup>5</sup> Prior to this development, though, Ikorodu had been an important trading post of the Remo Kingdom lying along the trade route between Lagos and Ibadan as well as into the hinterland of Yorubaland. Its strategic location along the Lagos Lagoon had also made it a significant trading port after Lagos during the closing years of nineteenth century. These factors essentially made the town a centre of commerce before event of 1894 shaped the foundation for the subsequent change. Whereas these factors among, others led to the transformation of Ikorodu, its proximity to Lagos also resulted in its development into an urban area. Thus, the urbanization of Ikorodu is also connected to the urban sprawl in Lagos.

### **Ikorodu before Annexation/ Evolution into Settlement**

Ikorodu was founded between 1600 and 1650 by an Ijebu-Remo prince, Oga, who was a hunter. It was nevertheless conquered by the Bini in the period shortly after its settlement and a Bini chief Oliha now corrupted to Olisa, was stationed there perhaps for the collection of tributes.<sup>6</sup> The economy of Ikorodu during this period was diverse thus encouraged farming, fishing, hunting and trade. The Bini conquest though, did not bring about any administrative connection with Lagos which had been conquered by the Bini earlier; it nonetheless promotes links between the two communities. As such Lagos was able to supply salt to Ikorodu and via that routes to the interiors, the Ijebu were equally able to export their native clothes through Ikorodu to Lagos to as far as Europe. And

5. NAI, Ije Prof. 2C32/1,8..

6. Agiri, "Lagos-Ikorodu Relations", 206.

during the peak of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, Ikorodu became an important trading port and transit point for interior communities in Yorubaland. However, following the conquest of Lagos by the British in 1861, which subsequently affects the slave trade in Ikorodu, settlers that peopled the community intensified their efforts on the cultivation such crops as yam, maize, vegetable. Thus Ikorodu as a farm settlement subsequently expanded into a market town where merchants from Ijebu-Ode, Sagamu, Epe and other towns converge to transact business.<sup>7</sup> The description of Ikorodu as a farm settlement is quite apt because the etymology name, Ikorodu is a corrupted version of "Okoodu" (farm of variety of vegetable). Subsequently, as the volume of trade grew, the town of Ikorodu also developed in prominence. The population of the settlement gradually increased as people of other ethnic group apart from the Yoruba such as the Isoko, Ijo, Urobo, Igbo, just to mention but a few began to migrate and settled down in different part of the town.<sup>8</sup>

As more people moved into the town, it expanded into all direction and even ate into other settlements. Basically, Ikorodu is made up of core groups or nuclei referred to as 'Itun', each of which has an exact boundary defining it from another.<sup>9</sup> Itunmaja, for instance, was populated mainly by people from Idowa, an important historical Ijebu town. Itunwaiye was settled by people from Iwaiye in present day Ogun State. Itunsoku was settled by people from Isokun quarters in Sagamu, then Layeode was peopled by Ode-Remo, Itagbodo by people from Oke Godo, Itun Elepe is a quarter containing Elepe

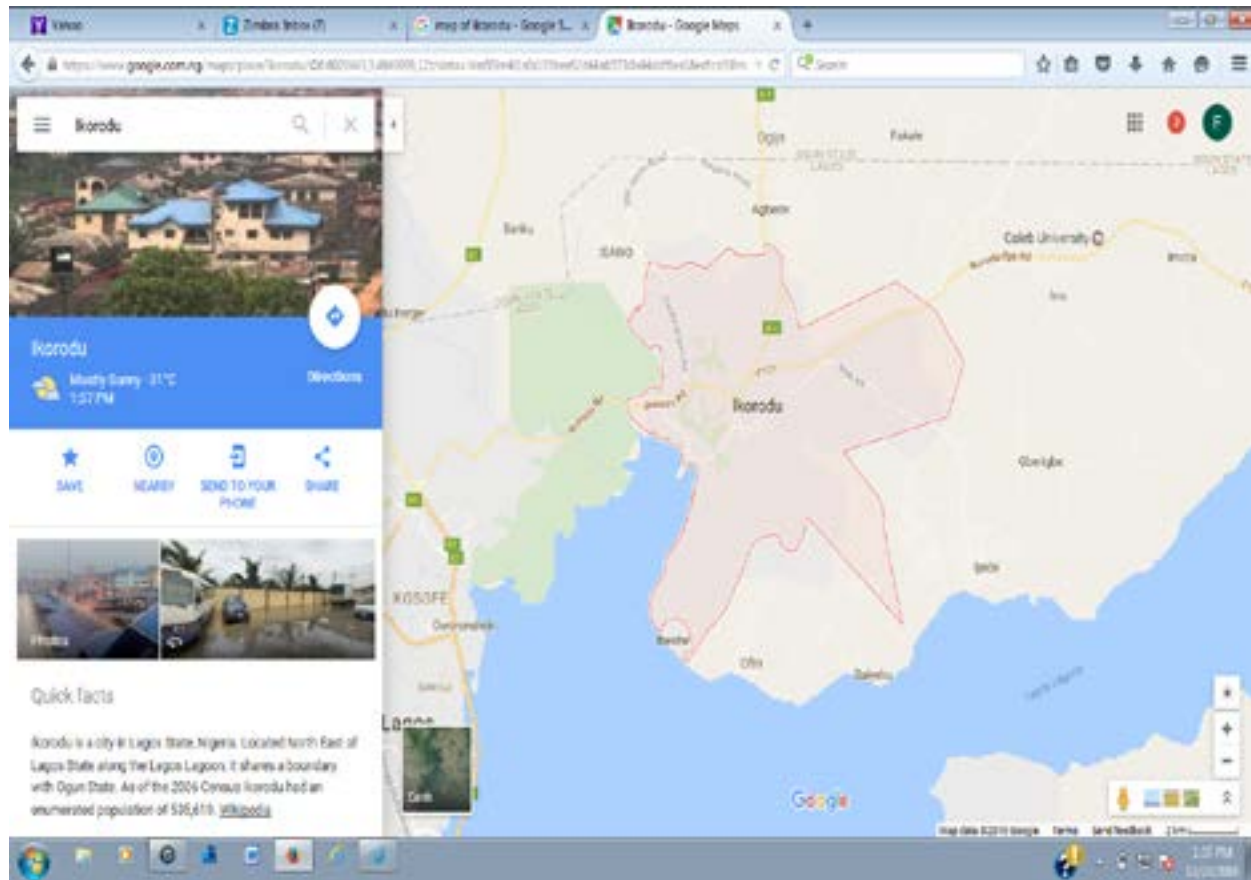
7. Interview with Oba S. A. A. Oyefusi (The Ayangburen of Ikorodu till date), 31<sup>st</sup> July 2016.

8. Faluyi Kehinde "Migrants and the Socio-Economic Development of Lagos From the Earliest Times to 1880" in *Lagos Historical Review* 1 (2001): 68-71.

9. Ibid Interview with Chief Mathew Ayodele Awolesi (Former Chairman Ikorodu Local Government), 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2016 .

(Sagamu) descendants.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, the process of urbanization developments in Ikorodu has spread into its surrounding towns and villages so much so that some of these villages like Ipakodo, Igbogbo, Ibeshe, Owode, Ishawo, Majidun, Ijede, Baiyeku, Oreta, Ofin, Ebute Ige etc. are considered as important parts of Ikorodu. The 1894 annexation and merger with the Lagos Colony incorporated all these communities that made of Ikorodu.

### Map showing Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos State



Source: Google. Accessed 23 December 2019.

10 . Mathew Ayodele Awolesi, "Ikorodu Yesterday Today and Tomorrow", (keynote address at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ikorodu Oga Day, Ikorodu, 19-27 November, 1993); 47.

## The Transformation of Ikorodu

Indeed, following the Cession Deed of August 4, 1894, Ikorodu, its surrounding communities and people became British subjects and fully integrated into the Lagos colony. The hitherto native political institutions such as the Oloja and the Osugbo seized to exercise official power. During this period, these formal political rulers became agent of the colonial government but strictly as stipendiary administrative officers.<sup>11</sup> The development continued until 1901 when a Central Native council was established for the Ikorodu District. Many of the native chiefs such as the Balogun, the Oloja functioned in advisory capacity to the colonial Resident Officer who has the responsibility to maintain law and order.

By the opening years of the second decades of the twentieth century however, Ikorodu and its environs were administered under the Epe-Ikorodu District between 1913 and 1938. It was during this period that Ikorodu assumed a 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Township status, including the Beach Market said to have been founded by Oga's brother, Sekunmade.<sup>12</sup> However, by April 1 1938, Ikorodu Native Authority was founded as a result of disagreement between Ekpe and Ikorodu. Gradually and steadily, Ikorodu began transforming into an urban centre since the opening years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Ikorodu and its environs had begun to witness qualitative change in every sphere as a result of increase in different forms of trade in the society. The transport section became very attractive to all sorts of persons who were interested in the business.

11. Boge, "Administration History of Ikorodu," 140.

12. NAI, CSO.26/51045 (Report for 1918, 1919 and 1920 on the Districts of the Colony).

By 1920, as a means to fully take advantage of the growing commercial activities in Ikorodu, boat and ferry services were introduced to transport people from Ikorodu to Lagos. This opened up Ikorodu to greater commercial opportunities as both foreigners and indigenes of Ikorodu started to invest in the economy of the town. In addition, investments were also made into the textile and ceramic industries.<sup>13</sup> By the 1960s, the number of industries established in Ikorodu has risen above five.<sup>14</sup> This development further attracted more people to the town, especially in the Odogunyan and Odo-Nla areas of Ikorodu which were until now suburbs. Moreover, the construction of the Lagos-Ikorodu road in the early 1950 makes Ikorodu more accessible.<sup>15</sup>

As previously noted, the expansion and transformation of Ikorodu was also influenced by socio-political and economic developments in Lagos. It should be recalled that the Lagos port was and still the most visited Nigerian port during the colonial period and even after independence. It was also a former capital. All these brought tremendous development and boosted the development of Ikorodu. And when the post-independence state government decided to create industrial estates all over the state, land was set aside at Odogunyan and Odo-Nla areas of Ikorodu for this purpose.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the establishment of industries encouraged people to move to the area to purchase land for residential and industrial drives.

13. Agiri, "Lagos-Ikorodu Relations," 204-21.

14. Interview with Alhaji Mufutau Ajisebutu (Ikorodu Party Chairman for Peoples Democratic Party) 10<sup>th</sup> August, 2016.

15. Interview with Comrade Ayodele Elesho (Former Commissioner for Information, Lagos State), 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2017.

16. Interview with Alhaji Lateef Sulaimon (Former Local Government Counselor, Owode, Ikorodu, Lagos), 21 November, 2015

New residential areas developed in and around the industrial areas. The advent of civilian administration following the exit of the military gave rise to the development of housing estates by the Jakande and Shagari administration of 1983, which brought large number of people to Ikorodu to acquire these houses, thereby bringing larger number of people to Ikorodu. Consequently, the population increased from about 70,000 in 1963 to about 300,000 in 1990 and to over a million in 2000 a jump of over 200 percent.<sup>17</sup> Whereas in the 1980s, the Lagos end of Ikorodu was at the Government College Ikorodu, but by the 1990s new towns have emerged at Agric, Owotu, Agbede and other areas. By 1999, which is the terminal date of this paper various degrees of transformation had taken place. All the known features of an urban area have become conspicuously evident.<sup>18</sup>

### **Colonial Factors that Led to the Transformation of Ikorodu**

Indeed, the transformation of Ikorodu began in the period shortly after the town and its environs were ceded to the British on August 4, 1894. This was the consequence of several treaties signed by the Akarigbo that saw to the cession of certain territories in Ijebu-Remo (including Ikorodu to Great Britain).<sup>19</sup> Thereafter Ikorodu became an administered part of the Lagos Colony, cutting it away from Sagamu and Ijebu-Ode.<sup>20</sup> With the establishment of Ikorodu Native Authority in 1901 by the British Colonial Administration to include Ikorodu town and independent villages of Agura, Ebute, Aga, Ibeshe, Ashashe, Oshorun, Isin, Oripodi and Ipakodo, Ikorodu began to experience some

17. Leo C. Dioka, *Lagos and Its Environs* (Lagos: First Academic Publishers, 2001), 164.

18. Interview with Alhaji Tufegboye Adewunmi (Former Chairman Ikorodu Local Government), 14<sup>th</sup> August, 2015

19. Oduwobi, *Ijebu under Colonial Rule*, 40-43.

20. Friday Aworawo, "A History of Isawo Community and Its Environs, Ikorodu, 1900-2002," (Unpublished Bachelor of Arts Degree in History and Strategic Studies, University of Lagos, 2007), 2-7.

developments, which led to its transformation beginning from the 1950s.<sup>21</sup>

As noted in the aforementioned, the construction of the Lagos-Ikorodu road in 1953 opened up the town for easy and faster movement of people and goods between Ikorodu and Lagos. By the turn of the second half of the twentieth century, the transformation of Ikorodu had no doubt, been aided by a number of related factors ranging from social and economic to political factors; a phenomenon that has transformed Ikorodu from a mere vegetable farm into an urban community.

### **Socio-Economic Factors**

The transformation of Ikorodu, which has implication for social life in the area, is partly as a result of the revolution that had taken place in the transport network between Ikorodu and Lagos. The opening up of Ikorodu had tremendous effects on the town and connecting towns of Igbogbo, Ipakodo and on the far away Imota and Ijede. Thus, one of the factors that led to the transformation of Ikorodu was the construction of Lagos-Ikorodu road in 1953; an achievement of the colonial master.<sup>22</sup> Prior to this period, the evacuation of palm produce, food crops and fish from Ikorodu and its surrounding lagoon settlements to Lagos depended on the rowing boats. These were slow and prone to the winds and storms causing them to capsize in which many lives were lost.

In 1919, Mr. Joshua Ricketts, the fourth son of the Reverend John Edwards Ricketts of the Agbowa enterprise, went into the business boat building. By 1921, he had built the

first motor launched named “Letitia” after his mother, and introduced the first motor launched linking Lagos to Ikorodu and other important Lagoon ports.

The introduction of a motor launch service by Mr. Ricketts revolutionized lagoon transportation during the colonial period. Letitia could carry as many as twenty-five passengers and, at a speed of 8 miles per hour covered the distance between Ikorodu and Lagos in one and a half hours. The service was therefore, a marked of improvement and ensured speed and safety in water transportation on the Lagoon. From the early beginning, particularly between 1921 and 1923, Mr. Ricketts had no serious competitors. His fleet augmented to five during the period. In 1925 however, Mr. Ricketts transport service began to face a tough competition from Mr. Osinubi, an indigene of Ikorodu, who had acquired speed boats for the transportation business with a trade name “Owolowo”.<sup>23</sup> However, just exactly half a decade into the business, one of the Owolowo boats, named Iyalode, capsized in the Lagoon as a result of overloading. The colonial government, thereafter, imposed stricter controls over the operation of the steam boots which were essentially done to guarantee the safety of passengers. As such it became mandatory for each boat to carry life jackets during voyages. Furthermore the operators have to hire the services of experience sailor and obtain marine license. And yet another was that, the boats were subjected to regular inspections to ensure that they were seaworthy. These measures certainly reduced accidents on the Lagoon and boosted passengers confidence on the use of water means of transportation.

21. Oduwobi, *Ijebu under Colonial Rule*, 40.

22. Abiodun Naimot Allison, “Ikorodu and her Neighbours in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Intergroup Relations”, a Final Year Project of the Department of History, University of Ibadan, 1982, 24.

Unfortunately though for some of Mr. Ricketts’ competitors that could not meet

23. Agiri, “Lagos-Ikorodu Relations,” 212.



the new requirements sold off their boats and fortunately too Mr. Ricketts was the main beneficiary. As a consequence, by 1939, the Rickett's fleet had increased to twelve despite the stiff competition from the Owolowo Company. Many Ikorodu people despite the stiff competition still preferred to journey in the Owolowo boats, as Mr. Rickett's services was perceived as European dominated.<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding, however, these two prominent companies continued to function side by side to the benefit of all.

However, in just twelve years after the first major boat capsizing involving Olowolo Company in 1932; another accident once again took place in 1942. Specifically on 15, January that year, another Iyalode, of the Olowolo Company was involved in another sea disaster caused again by overloading. This event compelled the government to adopt yet again stricter measures against congested boat service in the lagoon. Not even Mr. Rickett's fleet was excluded. The Owolowo Company was compelled to reduce the number of boats in its fleet. This finally gave Mr. Ricketts an edge over his competitor. Perhaps the most significant consequence of the 1942 boat disaster was the impetus it gave to the planning and construction of the overland route from Lagos to Ikorodu. The death toll in the accident aroused the anger of people in Ikorodu, Epe, Sagamu and Ijebu-Ode. A committee of concerned citizens of these towns was formed to raise funds for the construction of the road, which was eventually completed with Federal Government Support in May 1953.

The construction of the road was the last straw that broke the camel's back. This development introduced the automobile as yet another effective means of transportation.

24. Interview with Tajudeen Lawal (Retired Civil Servant, Ikorodu Local Government), 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2019.

The implication was that the fleets of Ricketts now have to contend with vehicles meant to ply Ikorodu-Lagos road. Between 1953 and 1956, however, six out of the seven boats on Mr. Ricketts' fleet had been declared not seaworthy by the government. And indeed, by that time, the boats only plied the Ebute Ero to Ebute Meta route.<sup>25</sup> The continuity and change in the transport sector thus fostered transformation of Ikorodu. The Ikorodu-Lagos road, which was completed in 1953 opened up Ikorodu to Lagos and thus to the outside world more than ever before.<sup>26</sup> It would be recalled that Ikorodu's location has always proved to be strategic as far back as the era of slave trade during which the Egba among other trading partners fought for its control.

With the completion of the Lagos-Ikorodu road, it took less time to travel from Ikorodu to Lagos vis-a-vis. Moreover, more goods and services were then exchanged between the two locations. Thus, Ikorodu started to serve both as a place of work and a place of residence for people as well as for many industrial establishments, though on a small scale. Many indigenes and settlers of Ikorodu who were working in Lagos also returned to Ikorodu to sleep on a daily basis. As time went by, many Ikorodu indigenes took the opportunity of the road transport to engage in different forms of trade and apprenticeship. The road link thus enhanced hometown commitment on the part of the indigenes. With the completion of the road, other people especially traders from neighbouring towns such as Oyo, Abeokuta, Ondo, Ekiti and as far as the Eastern part of Nigeria began to settle permanently in Ikorodu in order to ensure easy trading activities

25. Agiri, *History of the Peoples of Lagos*, 204-205.

26. Ibid.

with the people of Ikorodu as well as with Lagos.<sup>27</sup> Indigenes, migrants, settlers among others thus settled in Ikorodu.

Another factor that led to the transformation of Ikorodu into an urban community was the establishment of industries.<sup>28</sup> With the opening up of the Lagos-Ikorodu road in 1953, industrial establishments, though on a small scale, now began to take off. These efforts of indigenes such as Late Chief S. O. Gbadamosi and late Chief R.A. Allison were quite remarkable. Before this period, Mr. S. O. Kamson and his brother, Mr. J. F. Kamson in the 1930's both from Ikorodu, established in the textile business in Lagos and manufacturing of singlet. Their success encouraged many from Ikorodu to seek employment under them. By the 1940s, S. O. Kamson's modest factory along Adeniji Adele II Street had become a regular point of call for Ikorodu indigenes seeking employment in Lagos and apprenticeship. Meanwhile J. F. Kamson also established a factory at Isolo, which later moved to Akoka (now acquired by the University of Lagos). He, like his brother, also employed many Ikorodu indigenes.<sup>29</sup>

Among prominent Ikorodu business families in Lagos in the 1940s and 1950s were the Bensons and the Gbadamosis. The Benson family engaged in transport business in the city, while the Gbadamosi family also manufactured singlet and later went into ceramic manufacturing, this time in Ikorodu. S. O. Gbadamosi thereafter started a partnership business with his cousin Chief R. A. Allinson under the trading name of

27. Interview with Jimoh Shonoiki (Civil Servant, Ikorodu Local Government Council Secretariat), 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2015.

28. Ibid.

29. Interview with Alhaji Nurudeen Oluguna (Civil Servant, Ikorodu Local Government Council, Lagos), 19<sup>th</sup> August, 2016.

Ikorodu Trading Company in 1935 was very remarkable for manufacturing and famous in the transport sector.<sup>30</sup> This firm engaged in the importation of cheap Japanese goods and other commodities from Germany. The Ikorodu Company Limited later turned into a manufacturing outfit, producing woven and textile materials. This brought it into keen competition with the United African Company (U.A.C), which was then running a similar venture. The United African Company later sold off its underwear factory to the partnership of S. O. Gbadamosi. The Ikorodu Company Limited also diversified into ceramics production in 1943, but the venture never succeeded.<sup>31</sup>

At the time the garment factory was at its peak, it has 2,000 employees on its payroll. With the establishment of these indigenous industries, more people came to Ikorodu in search of employment. There was also the establishment of foreign industries, such as Nichemtex (now United Nigeria Textile Company, the largest textile manufacturing company in Africa), Peterson and Zochonis (P.Z.) Industries Ltd, and Cussons, Spintex, Ocean Fisheries, Facility and a host of other smear industries, all of which except Nichemtex were located in the industrial estate at Odogunyan (Ikorodu North).<sup>32</sup> With the establishment of both indigenous and foreign industries, Ikorodu witnessed an increase in population, as many people came in from neighbouring towns and beyond. These industries and the concomitant population increase resulted in rapid urbanization of Ikorodu turning it from a mere vegetable farm into an urban settlement.

Another factor that accounted for the rapid transformation of Ikorodu is its nearness

30. Ibid.

31. Interview with Comrade Elesho, op. cit.

32. Interview with Chief Segun Shoipo (an Indigene of Ikorodu), 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2015.

to Lagos. Due to its geographical proximity to Lagos, Nigeria's foremost commercial and until recently its administrative capital, Ikorodu enjoyed a strategic position, which makes it more attractive to people who wanted direct connection with Lagos.<sup>33</sup> Ikorodu town has changed a lot. In terms of areas, it has extended beyond the inner circular route (the old city wall). In other words, the whole of that area called 'Aiyeluja', both sides of Ayangburen Road extending to Solomade, Etunrenren, Lowa, Olori (both sides of Lagos road). The Ojogbe area, Gbasemo, Oriwu Hotel area to Oluwakemi and Adaraloye Streets, both sides of Igbogbo Road including Owode, and Oriwu College, Mabodu area including Solafun etc. The 1991 provisional census figure for Ikorodu Local Government area was 181,900. Out of this, at least 100,000 would be for Ikorodu town, more or less. About 60% of the town population are engaged in trade and other businesses in Ikorodu or in the greater Lagos metropolis.<sup>34</sup>

Also, as a result of the nearness of Ikorodu to Lagos, Ikorodu women became particularly prominent traders in Lagos, where they dominated the textile business, especially in the vibrant 'Gota' area, Ita Balogun, Alakoro, Apongbo etc. It has been estimated that about 90% of Ikorodu people dominated the economic life of Lagos. About 98% dominated trading activities in Mosalashi, Gota, Ereko, Apongbo, and Obun-Eko markets while about 40% dominated trading activities in Jankara and Alaporo markets. It has been estimated that Ikorodu women folk are so successful in business that they own about 60% of the wealth of all Ikorodu sons and daughters put together.<sup>35</sup> All of

33. Lai Olurode, *Social Change in Ikorodu Division (Ikorodu, Imota, Igbogbo, Ijede and Ipakodo): A Profile of the Elites* (Lagos: Unilag Consult, 1993) 27.

34. Awolesi, "Ikorodu Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow", 50.

35. Interview with Mrs. Mercy Adetokunbo (A Trader Living in Ikorodu since 1981), 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2016.

these were enhanced by the nearness of Ikorodu to Lagos.

The relatively high cost of living in Lagos is yet another factor that has led to the transformation of Ikorodu. The position of Lagos as a natural harbour and ultimately the terminal of land routes in South Western Nigeria made it a significant place in terms of population.<sup>36</sup> The availability of port facilities, lagoon and marine transportation greatly facilitated industrialization, which made Lagos the most industrialized city in Nigeria. Consequently, the population of Lagos continued to grow and this led to the need for more food to feed the rising population. Since Lagos could not provide enough food for its teeming population, it was compelled to seek the cooperation of some of its neighbours. This phenomenon influenced the relations between such neighbours as Ikorodu, Egba and Lagos. Thus, Ikorodu began to experience daily influx of people. More significantly, as the bad economy condition of Nigeria in the 1980s became difficult, landlords attempt to passing on the effect of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the government to tenants generally.<sup>37</sup> As such, many who had settled in Lagos began to Ikorodu as alternative area to acquire relative cheap accommodation, which does not, compromised the contact with Lagos.

The choice of Ikorodu became more appealing, particularly to low income earners, because the cost of living was relative low. A number of civil servants, some of whom are indigenes of Ikorodu as well as migrants in Lagos relocated to Ikorodu because of low

36. Kehinde Faluyi, "Migrants and the Socio-Economic Development of Lagos From the Earliest Times to 1880," *Lagos Historical Review* 1 (2001): 68-71.

37. Aworawo, "History of Isawo Community and Its Environs," 2-7.

rents.<sup>38</sup> Some rich also preferred to acquire landed properties in Ikorodu because they were cheaper compared with what obtained in Lagos. As at 1992, a room and parlour cost between ₦100,000 and ₦150,000 in the choicest part of Ikorodu and the adjoining town of Ipakodo whereas the same would cost between ₦300,000 and ₦350,000 in Lagos.

Generally, food prices are lower in Ikorodu area than in Lagos metropolis. At Imota, which is about 15 kilometres from Ikorodu, a bunch of plantain that would cost ₦500; in Mushin, Lagos, it may cost ₦1,500. The same goes for fruits.<sup>39</sup> The cost of living in Lagos thus led to influx of people into Ikorodu.

Another factor that led to the expansion of Ikorodu into a commercial urban centre was the efforts of some of its indigenes towards the development of the town.<sup>40</sup> Basically, the development of a town can be traced to the activities of individuals who have given practical expression to their sentiment, to ensuring that their town moves forward. Ikorodu in this respect was fortunate to have such citizens who fought to bring about social change and transformation in the town. Before the opening of the Lagos-Ikorodu road, Ikorodu could not provide employment opportunities for its people because of the weak economic activities there.

The pull to Lagos was stronger, as almost six out of every ten adult males from the town migrated to Lagos. The pull had significant effect on Ikorodu. One of the early

effects was the influence of some of the indigenes of the town, who were based in Lagos brought socio-political development in Ikorodu. These men had formed an association in Lagos about 1920. They then contacted the Oloja and his chiefs and proposed the building of a new palace for the ruler. This meant removal from the former palace in the centre of the town and since the project did not disturb British rule in the town, it went on unhindered. By 1936, the new palace was opened with the ruler assuming the new title Ayangburen.<sup>41</sup>

New ideas continued to filter back to Ikorodu and its environs through the activities of the youth of the area who were schooling in Lagos. For example, student societies or associations played a significant role in the implementation of the reforms of local government authorities from 1938 to 1950. Their social impact was also evident in the movement for secondary school education in Ikorodu Township. For example, S.O. Kamson among others, was very prominent in the building of Oriwu College in the town.<sup>42</sup> It is therefore worthy to note that the contributions of these people are crucial since development project may fail to take off in a community if efforts are directed at reaching the grassroots. Thus, the contributions of some of the indigenes of Ikorodu to the town led to the transformation of Ikorodu to an urban community.

The establishment of schools was another factor that led to the transformation of Ikorodu.<sup>43</sup> Prior to the establishment of the first secondary school in Ikorodu, Ikorodu

38. Olorode, *Social Change in Ikorodu Division*, 51.

39. Interview with Chief Shodipo.

40. Agiri, *History of the Peoples of Lagos*, 205.

41. Agiri, *History of the Peoples of Lagos*, 203.

42. Ibid, 205.

43. Interview with Chief Olusegun Adeyemi (Vice-Chairman for the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Lagos East Senatorial District), 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2016.



indigenes and others who had settled in Ikorodu took their children to Lagos for the continuation of their studies after their primary school education in Ikorodu.

The first primary school did not come to Ikorodu Local Government until 1892. This was the Methodist Primary school. Thus, between 1892 and 1994, when the first post primary education institution was founded in Ikorodu, Ikorodu pupils had their post-primary education in Lagos and other neighbouring towns. Therefore, the establishment of Oriwu College, served the post primary education needs of the people of Ikorodu. Thereafter, more schools were established. For instance, when Late Otunba Adeniran Ogunsanya was appointed the first Attorney General of the newly created Lagos State, and later as the State's Commissioner for Education, Government Teachers Colleges were created in the five divisions of the state and Ikorodu was a beneficiary. However, much later, Government Teachers College Ikorodu was changed to the Lagos State Model College, Igbogbo, which is one of the best post primary school institutions in the state.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the Technical College made possible by Commissioner Reuben Olorunfunmi Basorun when he was appointed as the Commissioner for Education in Lagos State in 1992 also provided Ikorodu settlers the opportunity to acquire technical knowledge and skill while still living within Ikorodu for residents. As at 1991/92 academic year, Ikorodu has 54 primary schools with a total enrolment of 38,301 pupils and 23 secondary schools with a total enrolment of 20,645 pupils.<sup>45</sup> With the establishment of schools, Ikorodu has experienced an influx of people who settled in the town for the educational developments of their wards.

44. Interview with Demosu Amojó (Head of Land Owner at Owode, Ikorodu), 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2016.

45. Olorode, *Social Change in Ikorodu Division*, 54.

With reference to accommodation issues noted in the aforementioned, the eviction and demolition of Maroko was another factor that contributed to the transformation and expansion of Ikorodu.<sup>46</sup> In July 1990, the prevailing military government of Lagos state ordered the demolition of Maroko community. The demolition of the entire community was carried out after a seven-day quit notice announced over the radio and led to the forced eviction of an estimated 300,000 people from their homes of several decades. Thus, thousands of these internally displaced persons found solace in Ikorodu, which offers some similar occupation opportunities such as fishing, trading, farming just to mention but a few to these newcomers.

The dualisation of the Ikorodu road project was another factor that brought about qualitative change in Ikorodu.<sup>47</sup> This was a major factor that led to an influx of people into Ikorodu, particularly Owutu (Ikorodu West) and Odogunyan (Ikorodu North). Commenting on the advantage of the dualisation of Ikorodu road, Colonel Mohamed Buba Marwa on April 2, 1993 promised that dualisation would save people travelling time. According to him at the foundation laying ceremony of terrace bungalow at Owutu housing estate in Ikorodu, eventual allottees would be lucky as dualisation of the Ikorodu road project would further reduce the time and stress associated with moving from Ikorodu to the Lagos metropolis.<sup>48</sup> With its ability to save people's travelling time as well as control the emission of pollutants from vehicles the dualisation of the Ikorodu road project brought more people into Ikorodu leading to its rapid transformation and development.

46. Interview with Comrade Elesho, op. cit.

47. Interview with Chief Karbiru Afolabi Aboki (Asiwaju of Isawo, Ikorodu, Lagos) 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2015

48. Ibid.

## Political Factors

The creation of Lagos State on May 27, 1967 engendered resonate tremendous urbanization in Ikorodu. Prior to this period, the metropolitan areas (colony province) of Ikeja, Agege, Mushin, Ikorodu, Epe and Badagry were administered by the Western Region.<sup>49</sup> At the creation of Lagos State, indigenes and settlers was divided into two and this has to do with whether to go with Lagos or remain a part of Western region. But majority of Ikorodu citizens, who realized the economic advantage offered by Lagos and as a result of its nearness to Lagos chose to be part of Lagos.

The annexation of Ikorodu to the newly created Lagos resulted in population explosion as Ikorodu started enjoying benefits like the establishment of court and schools by some of its indigenes, who were appointed members of the new Lagos state administration. Late Otunba T.O.S. Benson, in his capacity as the Federal Government Minister of Information, brought the transmitting station of the Voice of Nigeria to Ipakodo in 1962.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, late Otunba Adeniran Ogunsanya, the first Attorney-General and Commissioner for justice of Lagos State, brought the transmission for the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria to Ikorodu.<sup>51</sup> The creation of Lagos State as well as the political influence of some political holders from Ikorodu led to the rapid transformation of Ikorodu..<sup>52</sup> Since then, lands have also being acquired for staff of different organizations such as the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), University of Lagos (UNILAG), the National Electricity Power Authority (NEPA now PHCH), Caleb University and

49. Dioka, *Lagos and Its Environs*, 164.

50. Interview with Chief Adeyemi, op. cit.

51. Ibid.

52. Boge, "Administration History of Ikorodu," 135-150.

so on; this further brought many people working in Lagos to Ikorodu and accordingly transformed this area of Lagos State.

## Conclusion

By and large, we have thus far attempted a comprehensive analysis of continuity and change in the transformation of Ikorodu since the colonial period when the area was annexed and integrated with the Lagos colony. Though, Ikorodu had already been an important community because it offered opportunity as a transit point and corridor to interior hinterland to other Yoruba states before, during and in the post-colonial era. Despite this obvious significance, however, the colonial period was a watershed in the transformation process. A development that cannot be devious from the British era.

The article equally demonstrates how indigenes of Ikorodu as well as the development in Lagos also shaped and strengthened socio-economic and political development in Ikorodu. Thus the paper highlights a combination of factors; colonial legacy, indigenous initiatives, development in Lagos, political, social and economic factors that led to the transformation of Ikorodu from a mere vegetable farm to an urban centre. To this end, one can safely conclude that a combination of all these factors activated the process of urbanization, which in turn contributed to the transformation of Ikorodu. Despite the above however, Ikorodu is still confronted with the challenges of infrastructural deficits. For example, linking Lagos from Ikorodu is through one road. The situation has contributed to traffic congestion for commuters and business activities. The idea of the fourth Mainland Bridge to link Ikorodu with Victoria Island has remained a white-

Elephant project. Lack of proper planning, bad drainage system, waste management, slum clearance, town planning just to mention but a few are still begging for serious attention of the Lagos Government.<sup>53</sup> To overcome all these therefore, the Lagos Government must be genuinely committed to the improvement of infrastructural facilities in Ikorodu cum private sectors in view of the financial challenges of the state. By so doing, Ikorodu an important part of the state would continue to contribute to the overall transformation of Lagos as the fastest growing urban city in Africa.

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Quarantined

Rebecca Matheson

## Red River Raven

Tyler Turcotte

Garden River, Alberta

There is an unwelcome Raven perched outside my window on the fence. It seems like it is there all the time haunting me since that day in September. I wonder if it minds very much the first snowfall of the year. It has been awhile since I've been down to the Little Red to fish and kill its kin. There is a very small window of time of about three weeks in September when the fish are running strong. I was going down to the river daily then to catch walleye, goldeye, jacks, and the odd burbot, using whatever I could get my hands on for bait.

Throughout the month there was always a dozen rods or so stuck in the mud and just as many deadlines with sinkers and junks of bait. The rods and lines stayed on the shoreline overnight, and in the morning the Woodland Cree showed up and picked up right where they left off the night before. Fishing lines are twirled and loosed into the river at varying distances, and above where the line meets the water the Woodlanders put a small twig that bobs up and down with the current. When a fish is hooked the



line is not reeled in but pulled into the shore by hand. It is a technique unmatched by the Swampy of Plains Cree that I've casted with.

One of the *awasisuks* down there on the bank of the river went into the bush and come out with a wounded Raven by the foot. It was dangling there just off the ground trying to swing itself around and peck his fingers. Someone likely shot it with a 4.10 as there were a few fresh reds along the shore.

"Leave it be there by the bush, boy, I'll deal with it. Go back and fish. Drop it there."

By then the children were looking at the boy and the bird thinking of ways to torment what was left of its life. Above the bank in the trembling aspen with the whistling whips of the wind the Raven's kin were making lots of noise. Among them the unwelcome Raven perched outside my window I'm sure.

"Look there!": I shouted to the Woodland Cree children fishing on the Little Red. "Look there! Look at that big white bull moose!" I pointed and walked towards nothing of that sort. There was this piece of driftwood close by my feet, and while the children looked for the magical moose, their *mooshooms* told them about how I smashed the Raven until it died.

Seeing no white bull moose and some suspecting a ruse of sorts they mostly wandered back to their deadlines while a few lingered around the Raven. The caws of its kin stopped. I stooped to retrieve the dead bird by its talons and from beyond this world it grabbed onto my giner tight. You see, I was sure the bird was dead. I quickly

pulled my finger from its grip. From my ring finger, blood trickled from where the sharpest part of the talon pierced the skin.

In one concluding cacophony the unkind conspiracy fled the trees overlooking this horror-show. I tossed the limp bird by its wing into the Little Red among the deadlines. The echoes drifted off with the current but the *moonlow* face is remembered by the Ravens in Garden River forever.





Hieroglyphs

Rebecca Matheson

## Father and Son

Xiaowei Liang

Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou City, China

*In some Chinese families, one character in people's names of the same generation must be the same. These characters of every generation were prescribed long ago, due to a strong sense of carrying on the family line. In my maternal grandfather's family, according to the prescribed character order of "Yong (Forever), Qing(celebrate), Chang (Prosperity), Ji(inherit), Zu(ancestor), Yao(glorify)", everyone in my uncle's generation has "Zu" in their names, and my cousin's generation has "Yao". My cousin's future children will have "Yong".*

*In this article, "Zu" exclusively refers to my uncle and "Yao" to my cousin.*

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When I walked out of the gate of the bus station in Changan town in Dongguan City, Uncle Zu saw me immediately and waved. Yao, the twenty-one-year-old boy standing by a pillar with his father, had lowered his head and was clicking away on his phone screen with both hands. Apparently, he was playing games. When I walked up to them, Yao



stuffed his new Xiaomi8 with a skull pattern into his pocket under his father's orders and said "hi" in English to me. Compared to his father's closely cropped hair and tanned skin, Yao was comparatively white and had his hair permed. Some of his long hair had been dyed yellow. They had left their hometown, a poor village in Guangxi Province and worked in Dongguan City, Guangdong Province (the most prosperous province in south China). Uncle Zu worked at a community complex as a guard and Yao worked as a sewing worker in a garment factory. Yao was a member of what society called "new generation migrant workers". What were the fundamental differences between them, this pair of old and new generation migrant workers?

I arrived at Changan town quite early, so we went to have breakfast in a restaurant. Uncle Zu wore a red coat, black sweat pants and a pair of common-brand sports shoes, while Yao wore a pair of blue pencil pants and brand new Nike sneakers, which Uncle Zu thought Yao shouldn't have bought for six-hundred and ninety-nine yuan (about a week's salary of Uncle Zu).

"There are many cost-effective shoes in the stores or at the roadside stalls. They are also comfortable. The price of the shoes should be reasonable, according to our earning power", Uncle Zu repeated several times as we walked to the restaurant. Hearing Uncle Zu's complaints, Yao shook his head slightly, showing disapproval. He didn't want to explain anything to his father any more. When I asked him later, he said he was not an unwise consumer, and the Nike shoes looked really cool.

"How can common shoes, let alone bargains, be more comfortable than Nike? In fact, I bought it on Taobao.com at a discount. Compared to the price in the physical Nike

store, it was one hundred yuan cheaper. I saved money!" he said proudly, "You know, there are lots of things cheaper online. I once tried to teach my dad how to shop and play games online, but he had no interest."

The father and son had different consumer behaviors. The father lived a simple life and disliked vanity. He had a set of theories on how to be thrifty and just wanted to buy what was necessary for basic daily life. He was accustomed to saving as much money as possible to provide a better education for his son, to take better care of his elderly parents in their home village. The son had grown up in living conditions greatly improved by his father. Naturally, he did not care so much about saving money and was more willing to pay for expensive commodities if he wanted them. Once he earned a little money, he would consider buying a new phone, which was partly due to a conspicuous consumption mentality.

Their hobbies were also different. The father was not that interested in the cyber world and often played basketball with his workmates, while the son was Internet mafia, addicted to surfing websites, chatting online, or playing games in his spare time. Different from his father who gained limited information; the son obtained a variety of information through the Internet and would participate in discussions on social media.

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They treated me to a morning tea in a Cantonese restaurant. In a two-hundred-square-meter hall, dozens of large round tables were filled with people, and the waiter was pushing a cart with a variety of exquisite dim sum. In the sunny morning, both young and old were chatting leisurely. Little children were giggling. It was such a peaceful pleasure for

people to savor the fragrant tea and delicious food. However, such an abundant, delicate, comfortable and relaxing breakfast was not their usual taste. It was the first time in two years they had enjoyed morning tea.

“I worked forty-eight hours every six days, without weekends. Day shift is easy, but night shift is a little tiring. We have to overcome sleepiness. The salary is neither low nor high.” Uncle Zu described his work schedule calmly.

“Although my salary is about seven thousand yuan a month, higher than that of my father, I think I’m paid too little, because I work much harder than my dad. Night work is really very toilsome and harmful. You will find your spirits are totally down. Look at the pimples on my face. I only have one day for rest every month.” Yao threw his words out quickly, relieving his mood of discontent.

For them, there were no concepts of weekdays and weekends. They were burdened with intense stress and lived life at a rapid pace. They liked to drink wine, eat fried food and talk aloud with their workmates in the food stall along the street, especially after a strenuous day’s work.

Uncle Zu’s work expectations were lower than his son. Yao wanted a higher salary, a lighter workload and a better working environment. Yao had quit three unsatisfactory jobs within three years: the polluted air in a shoe glue factory, too much stress as an assistant chef, and in a family garment workshop. Now he was seeking another new job because of his irregular bedtime and the shift-work’s damage to his health.

Uncle Zu had also realized recently the importance of health and insurance, but he

still complained that his young son was unable to endure hardship and believed this was his major reason for registration. He said to his son, “you always rest for months after working for a while. You can’t earn money fishing for three days and then drying the net for two. You know, in the 1990s and 2000s, I also worked in a garment factory. I worked there for eighteen years, fourteen hours a day. When the Hong Kong bosses made a big order from our factory, we often worked almost eighteen-hour days. That’s what true fatigue is. If my eyes were as good as they used to be, I would still work in that factory. At that time I was a workshop leader. If you can persevere, you can also be promoted and then your workload will be less. I even did dirtier or more exhausting work than what you do now.” He stressed this sentence with a higher pitch.

Yao didn’t comment on his father’s words, but turned his head in my direction, and told me his opinion. “Don’t think I don’t want to work overtime. I depend on working overtime to earn more money. I’m not particular about work. I just want a better environment, less job stress, a regular schedule. That is okay.”

He glanced at his father, who listened attentively, and continued, “The whole plant’s atmosphere is also depressing. After working each day, I’m depressed, I don’t think I can return the next day. I don’t get paid enough for this mental torture. I don’t have to bear the pressure. We work for a better life. If we are unhappy at work, our lives will not be happy either.”

Yao had a stronger awareness of rights safeguarding and highlighting a man’s dignity. Unlike his father, he would not do a job without at least three social insurances and one housing fund. He would not accept insult and humiliation from managers and bosses;



he would talk candidly about the issue of wages and holidays with his workmates and leaders, even though it made no difference.

“My father’s generation had no resources, no knowledge and no technology. They have suffered since birth. As long as they can earn money, they can stand even greater pain and bitterness. We young people won’t act like our fathers. No matter how much you bully me, I can withstand it as long as you pay me. We haven’t suffered, and we have our own ideas. We don’t want to be bullied. Our ideas are different from theirs. Why do we live in the world? Not just to earn money. We have to live like a man. At the very least, the bosses cannot be too mean. We have our own feelings and understandings of life. Some things can be tolerated, but some things can’t,” he gushed.

Maybe the father heard these heartfelt words from his son for the first time, as he was a little stunned. Maybe what his son had said was true. He didn’t refute it.

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According to scholars’ research reports, the general education level of new generation migrant workers was higher than that of old generation migrant workers. As is the case with this father and son. Uncle Zu couldn’t finish his primary school education owing to poverty and had worked in Dongguan City for over twenty-five years since he was sixteen years old.

“Getting into college through examination is a springboard which helps you jump out of the mountainous area”, he repeatedly told his son while he studied in school. Uncle Zu struggled to make money and sent his son to a city’s school charging high tuition, but it didn’t pay off.

Yao majored in Internet in a secondary technical school after graduating from junior high school. Along with many of his schoolmates who studied journalism, electronics, marketing, accounting, or administrative management, he didn’t engage in the so-called major-targeted work and finally worked in factories.

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“Attending secondary technical or junior college is useless. Only an undergraduate can have a promising future.”

This is Yao’s opinion.

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I asked him if he wanted to attend a self-taught higher education examination to receive a diploma. He mocked me, saying “Who is in the mood to learn? All day I sew the clothes vibrating with the machine, tired to death, and my bones almost fall apart after work. Besides, I was a bad student in school. I hardly touched my books. Read books again? Totally impossible!”

Yao’s words pierced the truth. Studying, reading and thinking were all very remote things to him, this twenty-one-year-old man.

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When talking about marriage, Uncle Zu highlighted the importance of objective conditions.

“Two people are fit for each other,” was Uncle Zu’s core opinion. In the 1990s, my

uncle and aunt met on a blind date. Their match was arranged by a mutual friend of their families. My uncle had three siblings while my aunt had four. They lived in different villages in the same town and their families were both poor. They both worked in the factories in Dongguan City. They got along well with each other and believed each other to be diligent, honest and responsible people who could live together well. They soon got married. Certainly, my uncle loved my aunt, but more importantly, their family backgrounds, values, social status and income conditions were similar. It was what his “suitability” meant. Even now, he still believed that although suitability and love could co-exist, only based on “suitability” could love be stable. It was easy to nurture love but whether fitness or not was decided.

Last year, Yao fell in love with a girl in the shoe-factory and they planned to create their happy future together in the city, but everything changed after the Spring Festival. The girl dated a local man in her hometown under her parents’ request and changed her mind. The man had a five-story house and a car and a small successful local business.

“She needn’t struggle in the city anymore. She could raise children peacefully in a small town,” he comforted himself by trying to understand her choices, but later questioned, “but does she really love him?” It comforted me that he still believed in love and hoped to find a girl that truly loved him in return.

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After breakfast, I visited their twenty-five-square-meter apartment that cost one thousand yuan per month. The old grey concrete ground had blackened. In the small

living room, there was a tattered mini-sofa, a round table and some stools. A cutting board and knife, a spatula and wok above a gas stove on a rectangular desk, and a cabinet comprised their kitchen. Inside the cabinet, there were bowls, chopsticks, plates, dry noodles, garlic, seasoning and other piecemeal things. Looking into two small rooms, stacked against the wall were several plastic cases with layers of clothes, some paper boxes, a mat and some packages. Besides a bed, some clothes, towels, umbrella, hats, bags were hanging on ropes.

In this tiny rental, we talked about dreams and future plans. Uncle Zu responded quickly and was determined to go back home after he retired. Actually, this middle-aged migrant worker had a clear goal throughout his life: he wanted to earn more money as much as possible, to get his children in to a better school, send money back to his parents in the village, build a new house in his hometown, wait for his children to grow up, go back to his village and raise his grandchildren. For the prosperous city, he felt he and his wife were just outsiders who temporarily lived there and didn’t expect too much, although they had worked there conscientiously for years, dedicating their youth and adulthood to that place.

Yao, this young migrant worker, was uncertain when thinking about his future at first. He hesitated for a while and said that he would definitely like to change his job if he could, but he was not sure what he would like to develop as a long-term career among all his previous positions: construction worker, chef, salesman, or courier. (He didn’t want to be a common worker forever, like his father.) As for the question of where he would settle down, “Certainly I will not work in a village in the country. I want to make money

in the city,” he said firmly. Pausing for a moment, he then continued to say, “I want to buy a house in the city, but housing prices are too high. Only relying on my present salary, it would take fifty years to pay off the mortgage (for a standard apartment). If I can be a small-time manager, I might afford this and let my child study in the city, but...difficult... it would take a long time”, he paused again, “Probably, I would leave my children to my parents in their hometown, and my wife and I would continue working in the city.”

When saying it, this twenty-one-year-old man did not look worried or upset. He was still young, and his vitality and hope could not be suppressed.

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The ideas of the father and the son collided when it came to consumerism, working conditions, and marriage concepts, but it seemed that their life paths would probably have few differences: “Zu” (ancestor) and “Yao” (glorify) will both work hard in the city for about forty years until they can go back to their hometown to enjoy a big house in their old age. Miserably, they have little chance to earn big money and climb to a higher social position, bringing glory to their ancestors.

In the foreseeable future, if Yao’s children—Yongs—do not succeed in studying or starting up a business (it’s hard), Yongs will be most likely to repeat the fate of their father, being a “newer generation migrant worker”. Just like their names, their life path seem to be prescribed.

That day when I left by bus, the modern and grand Wanda Plaza came into my view. Its colorful lights and dynamic effects on the huge screen were so gorgeous by nightfall.

That is what we call “Dongguan City”. When we talk about “the world’s factory” or “Dongguan miracle”, we refer to the Dongguan Avenue, lofty commercial buildings and countless factories contributing a high Gross Domestic Product. However, it doesn’t include the crowded rental houses and the tired workers “Wo Ju” (Narrow Dwelling) who will live there most of their lives.





Textire #2

Rebecca Matheson

# **A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Some Idiomatic Expressions in the Igbo Language**

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## **Abstract**

Idioms as linguistic and fixed syntactic expressions have meanings different from the meanings of the individual words which make them up. They are part and parcel of the resourceful richness of the everyday use of language. Idioms also constitute an integral and robust lexico-syntactic resource available to the speakers of any language. Thus, part of the knowledge of the grammar native speakers have about their language includes the knowledge of the idiomatic expressions and how they are used socio-pragmatically. Like in many other languages, idiomatic expressions are very pervasive in the Igbo language



and they are used to express a wide range of socio-pragmatic functions. This paper provides a descriptive analysis of idiomatic expressions in the Igbo language from a socio-pragmatic view point. The data for study are based on the Ngwa dialect of Igbo which the authors speak with native speakers' competence and were elicited from some competent adult speakers of the Igbo language from the study area (Abia, Imo and Enugu States; three of the five states in Nigeria where Igbo is indigenously spoken) and descriptively analyzed. The findings of the paper reveal that idiomatic expressions in Igbo which have a variety of structural and semantic patterns are mainly used to express a wide range socio-pragmatic attitudinal disposition. Such attitudinal disposition can be unfavorable, frivolous, contemptuous, lightly humorous or quietly mocking towards a person or thing denoted by the idiom. It is also revealed that the accurate and the appropriate use of idioms in Igbo presuppose competence in the language on the part of the language user; competence which is not only linguistic, but also pragmatic and socio-cultural.

## Introduction

As noted by McCarthy (1990: 11), human languages contain a large number of items represented by types of prefabricated units, which may be multi-word units or fixed expressions. Such multi-word units as he noted are well-established lexical combinations which may consist of one or more word forms or lexemes and are so common in normal language use and they raise a variety of formal, syntactic, semantic, situational, and stylistic concerns. Idiomatic expressions form a distinct group of multi-word expression and they constitute a special category of lexical items presenting a fixed structure, a great rigidity and complex structure. According the Webster, an idiom is "an expression established in

the usage of a language that is peculiar to itself either in grammatical construction or in having a meaning that cannot be derived as a whole from the conjoined meanings of its elements" (1993:1123). An idiom is constituent or a series of constituents for which the semantic interpretation is not a compositional function of the formatives of which it is composed (Fraser 1970). Idioms are language-specific, relatively-fixed expressions where the meaning of the whole unit is not transparent from the meaning of the constituents of words that make up the whole unit (Lewis, 1997). The sequence of words which can constitute an idiom is semantically and syntactically restricted, with the characteristic feature of collectability and lexical fixity so that it functions as a single unit (Ndimele, 2007). Thus, from a semantic point of view, the meaning of the individual words that make up an idiom cannot be summed up to produce the meaning of the idiomatic expression. Thus, the meaning of an idiom is metaphorical and not literal. From a syntactic point of view, the words that make up an idiom do not often permit the usual variability they display in other syntactic contexts. This means that the words that make up an idiomatic expression do not usually permit alternatives in either their structure or position. Idioms are fixed expressions permitting no alteration in their composition. They are indivisible units with no variations of the constituents they are made of. They are attested cross-linguistically and used in both formal and informal written and verbal of communication modes. They are part and parcel of everyday use of language. The examples in (i) and (ii) are from the English language.

- i. to take the bull by the horn                    'to act boldly'
- ii. to rain cats and dogs                            'to rain heavily'

Idioms are very important in any discourse. They have played an important role in languages and their use is widespread that an understanding of their meaning is an essential part of maintaining a successful communication in listening, speaking, reading or writing. They can be used to express a wide range of emotions such as delight, happiness, humour, resentment, desolation, hopelessness, etc. Halliday (1985) classifies idioms into three broad types based on their functions. These are: (i) ideational idioms that encapsulate the nature of the message, (ii) interpersonal idioms that perform interactional function and (iii) relational idioms that ensure cohesion in text. Both speakers and writers use idioms to add colour to their speech and writing; with idioms they introduce and capture powerful imageries which can make their speeches and writings appear as artistic expressions, and also make them more creative and lively thus making listeners and readers to think beyond the surface facts of the idiomatic expressions. Language learners learn the grammar of a language and with time get acquainted with the vocabulary of the language but without a competent knowledge of the idiomatic expressions in the language the learners' speech will remain merely ordinary without the colour and aesthetics which idioms bring to bear on speech. As also noted by Fernando (1996: 234), 'no translator of language or language teacher can afford to ignore idioms if a natural use of the target language is an aim' Historically, idioms originate from the socio-cultural backgrounds of a people and are then given linguistic expression using the language of the speech community involved.

Generally and cross-linguistically, idioms have some common features of compositeness (commonly accepted as multiword expression usually more than one minimal free form (Makkai 1972, Cowie and Mackin 1975)), institutionalization (conventionalized, well-established accepted, and recognized fixed linguistic expressions within language

communities where they are used (Bauer 1985)) and semantic opacity (non-literal and figurative semantics). These features as noted by Fernando (1996) ensure that communication with idioms is not only coherent but also cohesive and make discourse socially acceptable and very lively. With respect to their morphosyntactic structure, idioms can be in the forms of compounds, phrases, semi-clauses and clauses.

Much focus on the linguistic analyses of idioms have centred mostly on the structural forms of idioms and the ability of the recipient to process, construct and decode the meaning of the idioms from the sender within mono-cultural and cross-cultural linguistic settings (Searle 1996). As also noted by Searle, the context within which the idioms are rendered plays very crucial role to enhance adequate understanding and interpretation of idioms. Understanding and interpretation of idioms based on the contexts within which they are expressed ensure that there is convergence between the intended meaning of the speaker and the understood meaning of the recipient of the idiom. It is therefore in determining meaning of idioms based on their contexts of use that pragmatics interfaces with semantics in enhancing adequate and appropriate interpretations that are culturally biased. Pragmatics concerns itself with the study of language use from the point of view of the users of language, especially the choices users of language users make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interactions or contexts and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in a communication exchange. Thus, within the confines of pragmatic tenets, constructing the intended semantic imports of idioms must be done in the context, knowledge and belief system of the language users. For non-native speakers however, this is not an easy task since they do not possess the prerequisite cultural background knowledge which native speakers have.

The present paper focuses on the socio-pragmatic analysis of idiomatic expressions in the Igbo language. It specifically highlights the structure of idiomatic expressions in the Igbo language as well as their meanings and the socio-pragmatic imports inherent in them within the tenets of speech acts. There are no studies prior to this one that focus solely on the structure, the semantics and the socio-pragmatic features of the Igbo language idioms. The present study, therefore, is both timely and fills a gap in the research. Igbo refers to both the language and the speakers of Igbo speech communities of the south-eastern Nigerian states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. It is spoken as a minority language by some groups in the neighbouring south-south Nigerian states of Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers. Igbo has scores of regional dialects which are mutually intelligible. The present study is however, based on the Ngwa dialect spoken in seven Local Government Areas of Abia State. It is the variety which the authors of this paper speak with a native speakers' competence.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study as stated earlier is aimed at providing a descriptive analysis of idiomatic expressions in the Igbo language from a socio-pragmatic view point. It also examines the structural patterns of the idioms as well their functions in the pragmatic and cultural contexts of the users of the Igbo language.

### **Significance of the Study**

Apart from highlighting the structure and functions of the idiomatic expressions in the Igbo language, this study will also be significant by being a source of documentation and preservation of the idioms examined. Results of Igbo language endangerment studies

(e.g. Emenanjo 2007, Igboanusi 2008, Ohiri-Aniche 2008, Ani 2012, Anyaegbuna 2012, Osuagwu & Anyanwu 2015, Anyanwu 2016, Anyanwu & Atoyebi 2018, etc.) have shown that the inter-generational transfer of Igbo is getting weak and may no longer be robust and virile. This means that the domains of use of some aspects of Igbo language vocabulary and other expressions (including idiomatic expressions) are shrinking slowly and steadily. This study therefore will create/raise awareness on the potential dangers of not using such aspects of the language as idiomatic expressions. By creating and raising the awareness, this study would have been part of contribution towards the revitalization and preservation of this aspect of Igbo language as some of the respondents in this study acknowledged their neglect of this aspect of the language and promised to improve on their usage. Thus, a study such as this would provide an opportunity for sensitization that this aspect of Igbo language use could become extinct if the speakers do not continuously and vibrantly use it in their day to day conversations.

### **Methodology**

The present study is qualitative and therefore adopts a descriptive research design since it is aimed providing a descriptive socio-pragmatic analysis of idiomatic expressions in the Igbo language as well as highlighting their structure, meanings and socio-pragmatic imports inherent in them in conversational contexts. . This study was carried out between November, 2017 and October, 2018, using a descriptive survey design involving the use of oral interview and face-to-face elicitation of data. The study area for this research consisted of the seven Local Government Areas (Isiala Ngwa North, Isiala Ngwa South, Obingwa, Aba North, Aba South, Osisi ma and Ugwunagbo) of Abia State, Nigeria where the Ngwa Igbo is largely and homogenously spoken by the residents of the area

who are civil servants, business men and business women, students, and people from all walks of life. The data for the study were mainly collected by the authors (who are also native speakers of the Ngwa dialect of Igbo language) through participant observation over a period of six months (between November, 2017 and June 2018) in natural discourse situations such as traditional marriages, town hall meetings, burial ceremonies, church sermons, dispute mediation/settlements committee meetings conducted in the Ngwa Igbo by indigenous and native speakers of the Ngwa Igbo. One-on one elicited oral interviews conducted on some selected respondents were also used to cross-check and confirm the data collected through participant observation. The data collected were later analyzed descriptively in terms of their pragmatic functions within the theoretical framework of speech act theory.

The speech act theory analyzes the role of utterances in relation to the behavior of speaker and hearer in interpersonal communication. It is a communicative process (a locutionary act), defined with reference to the intentions of speakers (the illocutionary force of their utterances) and their effects on listeners (the perlocutionary effect of their utterances). The categories of speech act include directives (by which speakers get their listeners to do something by for instance, begging, commanding, requesting), commissives (by which speakers commit themselves to a future course of action, by for instance promising, guaranteeing), expressives (by which speakers express their feelings, by for instance apologizing, welcoming, sympathizing), declaratives (by which the speaker's utterance can bring about a sudden change, by for instance christening, marrying, resigning) and representatives (by which the speakers convey their belief about the truth of a proposition,

by for instance asserting, hypothesizing). The verbs which are used to indicate speech acts as intended by the speaker are sometimes known as performative verbs and the criteria which have to be satisfied in order for a speech act to be successfully executed are referred to as felicity conditions (Crystal, 2008:446).

### **Idiomatic Expressions in Igbo**

The Igbo language is very rich in idioms. The value for idioms in a discourse is so enormous that a speaker of the Igbo language is considered 'mature' culturally and linguistically if his/her speech in any communicative discourse is laced with intelligent, captivating and succinct idiomatic expressions. Most times, when an elderly person with a good proficiency of the Igbo language speaks, s/he uses idioms as preamble to show-case his/her eloquence and competence to impress his/her audience or fellow elders. Sometimes, the idioms serve as a way of insinuating the theme of a discourse. The use of idioms in Igbo is as old as time itself, and the idioms have very important functions in the language. It is part of the social norms of the Igbo speakers to use idioms to avoid offense, profanity and to show politeness to an audience though this practice appears to be a linguistic universal attested in all natural languages (especially African languages). Speakers of Igbo select idioms according to the situation and the purpose of the communication or based on the relationship of the participants in a particular discourse situation. This means that speakers choose their idioms according to the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves. In the tables that follow, we have provided some examples of idioms in the Igbo language highlighting their word-for-word semantics, their idiomatic translation, their categorial statuses as well as their socio-pragmatic implications in contexts. All the



idioms collected and presented fall within the ‘representative’ speech act category by which the users of such idioms convey and assert their beliefs about the truth of the idioms.

### Data Presentation

| S/N | Igbo Idioms (with direct glosses)        | English Translation       | Constituent Structure         | Socio-Pragmatic and Contextual Implication  |
|-----|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| 1.  | -ta oji aka<br>chew kola nut hand        | have a hand shake         | Verb Phrase (VP)<br>(V+NP+NP) | This describes a mutual and friendly handshaking usually between men exchanging greeting pleasantries in the Igbo society. This is literally compared to the chewing of the kola nut which a host is expected to present to his visitor as a sign of friendly welcome and acceptance.   |
| 2.  | -ta ahu`hu`<br>chew maggots              | suffer (V)                | VP (V+NP)                     | This refers to the process of going through untold hardship and it expressed in the idiom as one literally chewing maggots from flies which are not edible and consumable in the Igbo culture.  |
| 3.  | -kpu akpa l`anya<br>wear bag on the eyes | being careless            | VP (V+NP+PP)                  | This idiom is used to describe the careless and nonchalant attitude of someone in carrying out a task or making a choice. In the Igbo cultural setting, being careless or nonchalant is conceived as the impossible activity of one literally using bag to cover his/her face while carrying out a duty that requires the use of the eyes.    |
| 4.  | -ta isi mbe<br>chew head (of) tortoise   | being wicked              | VP (V+NP+NP)                  | This describes someone with the attributes of wickedness. Literally eating the head of a tortoise as expressed by the idiom in the Igbo society is giant task; which, even if it is possibly done, hardens the heart of the eater. Thus, the idiom is socio-pragmatically used to describe someone who is not moved to render help to others. |
| 5.  | -me ihu` abu`o`<br>do face two           | b e i n g<br>hypocritical | VP (V+NP+NP)                  | This idiom describes the inability to be transparent in one’s human dealings with others. In social context, anyone who is described with this idiom is perceived as literally having/wearing two faces and thus cannot be linked to a single personality but a double one.   |

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|-----|---|--|--------------------|---|
| 6.  | -magide u`wa jio`ji`<br>tie (tightly) world a<br>special wrapper known<br>as ‘george’ | B e i n g<br>pretentious<br>that all is well<br>with one even<br>when one is<br>faced with<br>difficult times. | VP (V+NP+NP)       | This idiom which literally means tying a special wrapper, ‘jioji’ tightly on the world, figuratively describes the act of pretending that one is fine and doing great even in the midst of hard times facing one. In the Igbo traditional cultural setting, a type of wrapper known as ‘jioji’ is valuable and anyone who puts it on is adjudged to be affluent and well to do even when the person might be suffering so much. This idiom contextually implicates that looking good externally with adorned ornaments may be pretentious to make others feel that one is financially okay. |
| 7.  | -ta u`kwa jaa eze<br>eat breadfruit splay<br>teeth                                    | be very truthful   | VP (V+NP+V+<br>NP) | This idiom which literally means ‘eating the breadfruit and splaying one’s teeth’ is figuratively used to capture the fact that someone is being very truthful and very honest in giving information or reporting a situation. In Igbo traditional cultural setting, cooked breadfruit is a highly valued delicacy and is eaten by all. It is expected that one having eaten such a highly valuable delicacy will be very truthful.   |
| 8.  | -we-lite ukwu<br>carry- up feet   | hurry up   | VP (V+NP)          | This idiom is contextually used to describe the process of hurrying up especially within the context of walking from one point to another in an errand situation.   |
| 9.  | -foro ntu`tu` taa<br>pull hair chew   | s w e a r<br>(s t r o n g l y )/<br>be tenacious<br>a b o u t<br>something                                     | VP (V+NP+V)        | This idiom describes the process of someone having the conviction or being tenacious to his/her held beliefs to the point of swearing an oath to convince others and this is expressed in the idiom which literally means to ‘pull out one’s hair to chew’.   |
| 10. | fu mkpi l`anya<br>grow (out) horn on the<br>eyes                                      | be shameless   | VP (V+NP+PP)       | This describes the attribute of someone being shameless to the point that s/ he does not care what others think and say about him/her. This attitude of shamelessness is expressed as ‘growing out horns on the eyes’   |

|     |   |   |            |  |
|-----|---|---|------------|--|
| 11. | onye aka abu`o`<br>person hand two                        | a thief                                       | NP (N+N+N) | This idiom is used to refer to someone who steals. The socio-pragmatic implication is that a thief in the Igbo society is viewed as having an 'extra hand' in addition to having a left and a right hand which are viewed to constitute one hand. Being referred as having two hands is suggestive of having a dual character. |
| 12. | onye aka ike<br>person hand strong                        | a miser/<br>accumulator                       | NP (N+N+N) | This refers to someone who is a miser and accumulates material possessions without having the tendency to give out to others willingly.  |
| 13. | onye anya ukwu<br>person eye big                          | a greedy<br>person                            | NP (N+N+N) | This idiom refers to someone who has an insatiable appetite for acquiring material possessions. Literally, the person is viewed as having 'big eyes' because nothing can satisfy the person.   |
| 14. | onye anya o`ku`/ anya<br>uhie<br>person eye fire/ eye red | a mischievous/<br>unreliable<br>person        | NP (N+N+N) | This refers to someone who is not trustworthy. Socio-pragmatically, the Igbo society views the person whom this idiom applies to as having the tendency to cheat, lie, connive, confuse or even to steal.  |
| 15. | onye anya ike<br>person eye strength                      | a extremely<br>covetous<br>person             | NP (N+N+N) | This describes someone who is strongly and extremely covetous of someone else's possession to the point that s/he can use any means to acquire such possessions. The phrase <i>anya ike</i> when used alone without <i>onye</i> preceding it can also mean 'an axe', a tool used in splitting log.                             |
| 16. | onye obi o`jo`o`<br>person heart bad                      | a unhelpful/<br>unsupportive<br>person        | NP (N+N+N) | This is used to refer to anyone who is unaccommodating. This idiom socio-pragmatically connotes a sense of the English idiom, "not ready to give a hand"   |
| 17. | onye obi u`fu`<br>person heart pain                       | an irritated/<br>easily<br>provoked<br>person | NP (N+N+N) | This is used to describe someone who gets easily irritated and provoked. In the Igbo traditional setting, the context of this idiom will be with specific reference to someone having the tendency of being intolerant.  |
| 18. | onye obi ike<br>person heart strength                     | a strongly<br>willed person                   | NP (N+N+N) | This refers to someone who is strongly willed to carry out any action that can surprise people.  |

|     |   |   |            |   |
|-----|---|---|------------|---|
| 19. | onye obi ebere<br>person heart mercy                | a merciful/kind<br>hearted person                   | NP (N+N+N) | This is used to refer to someone very accommodating, kind-hearted and merciful. Socio-pragmatically, when some is referred to with the idiom, the person is viewed to have a great sense of tolerance, generosity, and magnanimity.   |
| 20. | onye nti ike<br>person ear strength                 | a n<br>unthoughtful/<br>unconscientious<br>listener | NP (N+N+N) | This is used to refer to someone who can listen to instructions but does not put them into use.   |
| 21. | onye o`nu` u`gba<br>person mouth oil bean           | a garrulous<br>person                               | NP (N+N+N) | This describes one who is a talkative and thus cannot keep secrets. The person's talkative nature which is carried out through his/her mouth is compared to a mature "oil bean pod" which splays its seeds under a scorching sun.   |
| 22. | onye egbe o`nu`<br>person gun mouth                 | a boastful<br>person                                | NP (N+N+N) | This describes someone who is boastful and can use his/her boastful rhetorics to lay claims to personal accomplishments far above his/her ability. Such a person is directly viewed as one who emits shots of the Igbo indigenous rifle gun through his/her mouth; a sign of boastfulness.        |
| 23. | onye o`nu` ihie<br>person mouth slanted<br>position | a rude person                                       | NP (N+N+N) | This is used to refer to someone who is rude and talks disrespectfully especially to someone older than him/her. This idiom describes its addressee as not keeping his/her mouth 'straight' but 'slanted' in addressing or responding to someone else.  |
| 24. | onye afo` o`ma<br>person stomach good               | a kind person                                       | NP (N+N+N) | The Igbo people believe that kindness radiates from the stomach. Thus, this idiom refers to someone that is kind hearted, generous and ready to help.   |
| 25. | onye ihu` o`ma<br>person face good                  | a lucky person                                      | NP (N+N+N) | This is used to refer to someone who is lucky and easily favored by others. Such a person is socio-pragmatically viewed as having 'a good face' because he is always liked by all and sundry.   |
| 26. | ire abu`o`<br>tongue two                            | a liar  | NP (N+N)   | This idiom describes a liar as one with two tongues. In the Igbo traditional society, unreliability of character especially in the form of not telling the truth is disparaged and viewed in the context of one possessing a double tongue which makes it difficult for the person to be trusted. |

|     |   |   |                           |  |
|-----|---|---|---------------------------|--|
| 27. | afo` ita mmiri<br>stomach to-dry water          | a very stingy person  | N (N+INFINITIVE) P        | This refers to someone very stingy to the point that socio-pragmatically, the person is viewed and described as 'water having dried in his/her stomach' and therefore cannot radiate kindness in the form of being generous. |
| 28. | akpi`ri` i`kpo` nku`<br>throat to-dehydrate-dry | feeling of thirst   | N +INFINITIVE+N) P        | This idiom describes the feeling of thirst by using the throat as a reference point and by also describing the throat as being very dry.   |
| 29. | anwu` achaghi`<br>sun shine-not                 | economically dependent person                                 | NP (N)                    | This refers to someone who is dependent on others for his /her livelihood. The person is contextually perceived as someone who is not bitten by the sun since s/he does not toil to earn a livelihood but depends on others. |
| 30. | anu` kpo`ro` nku`<br>meat dry-dry               | a courageous and brave person                                 | NP (N+ Adjectival Clause) | This is used to describe a very courageous and brave person. The person is literary perceived as a 'chunk of well dried meat that fills the mouth'; thus showing how strong and courageous s/he can be.                      |
| 31. | atakata eloo<br>chew-chew swallow               | untrustworthy person  | N (idiophone)             | This describes one who is not reliable in moral character. The person is conceived literally as a chewable object that<br><br>one can be chewed persistently without successfully being broken down by the teeth             |
| 32. | gaa- gaa l`ogwu<br>shaky-shaky on thorns        | a fragile looking but courageous person                       | NP (N-Idiophone+ PP)      | This describes someone who looks weak and fragile physically but can accomplish great things.  |
| 33. | o`ku`ko` udumiri<br>fowl rainy season           | one who is always sick  | NP (N+N)                  | This idiom describes someone who is always sick and cannot stand up to the task of shouldering responsibilities.   |
| 34. | ediabali<br>hyena                               | someone who is always sleeping especially during the day time | NP (N)                    | This idiom refers to someone who is in the habit of sleeping all the time to the point of being very lazy and unable to attend to tasks.   |
| 35. | agwo` uchichi<br>snake night                    | a n unpredictable/unreliable person                           | NP (N+N)                  | This is contextually used to refer to someone who is unpredictable and cannot be relied upon.  |
| 36. | o`bata osu<br>pr.come.towards scatter           | an apple of discord/trouble maker                             | NP (N+N)                  | This refers to someone who is known to cause commotion wherever s/he is found.   |

|     |                                  |                              |            |   |
|-----|----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|---|
| 37. | oke nwanyi`<br>male woman        | a proud and courageous woman | NP (N+N)   | This is socio-pragmatically used to refer to a courageous woman who is able to accomplish tasks which are usually associated with men.                                  |
| 38. | oke ozu<br>male corpse           | a great person               | NP (N+N)   | This is contextually used to refer to a personality (man or woman) of great accomplishments.  |
| 39. | oke osisi<br>male tree           | a great male personality     | NP (N+N)   | This is contextually used to refer to a man of great personality who has lots of accomplishments to his credit.   |
| 40. | mma ihu abu`o`<br>knife face two | a hypocrite                  | NP (N+N+N) | This is used to describe someone who is a hypocrite, whose character cannot be vouched for by others. This is literally perceived as 'a knife with two sharpened faces. |

## Discussion of Findings

The data presented in the table above (1-40) together with their socio-pragmatic contextual implication show that idioms in Igbo are not used senselessly and aimlessly. From their implications, they are mainly and generally used as euphemisms to present harsh statements in a much more subtle or pleasant manner in order to avoid being offensive and confrontational in conversational discourse. This is the case for the idioms of numbers 2, 3,4,5,10,11, 21,22,23,26, and 27. Again, since, the discussion of verbal insult invariably raises the question of linguistic obscenity, profanity and other linguistic taboos, idiomatic expressions in Igbo are used as polite substitutes for offensive expressions (cf. Manda 2013, Matthew 2007). Similarly, the Igbo society condemns the use of some offensive linguistic concepts, language users sometimes, resort to using those terms that are idiomatic in order to conform to the societal prescriptions (Imoh 2013). For example in the Igbo speaking society, when an important personality dies, it is not culturally allowed to declare it in a plain and ordinary linguistic term known by everybody as 'x.....has died', it is rather put in a cultural permissible way such as 'oke osisi adala' 'an

important tree has fallen' which is a subtle way of saying that 'an important personality has died.

Also, from the data presented, idioms in Igbo consist of chunks of words (two word-items, three word items or four word-items) which constitute single part phrases whose meanings are not compositional but figurative. Unlike proverbs in the language which are full independent sentential expressions, idioms can only function as constituent units within sentences. There are basically two types of the idiomatic expressions in terms of syntactic structure. The first type consists of those with the VP structure, with internal variations ranging from V+NP, V+NP+NP, V+NP+NP+NP and V+NP+PP structure as in item numbers 1 to 10. These idioms with the VP structures are semantically used to express processes and states. The other type of idiomatic expression is of the exocentric compound NP syntactic structure consisting generally of internal structural variations such as N, N+N, N+N+N, N+ INFINITIVE+ N and N+ADJECTIVAL CLAUSE as can be observed from item numbers 11 to 39. This later class of idioms in Igbo semantically, denotes individuals who are aptly and descriptively characterized. Generally, the idioms are descriptive, describing processes and entities. Some of the idioms are constructed around some parts of the body (as in item numbers 1,3, 4,5,7,8-28) within which they are used to describe processes or entities while others are built around some animals (as in 33-35) which have cultural significance in the Igbo society. The inherent characteristics of such animals are directly related to behaviour of human referents they designate. As can be observed from the tables, each idiom has a socio-pragmatic context in which its semantic implication is felt.

Beside the semantic and structural aspects of the Igbo idioms, the idiomatic

expressions as can be observed from the presented data generally fulfill important socio-pragmatic functions. The idioms are used to address and refer to a wide range of socio-pragmatic issues that reflect specific situations and individual's inherent and manifested behaviour and characteristics relative and sensitive to the cultural views of the Igbo speakers. The use of each idiom is situation/setting specific and reflects certain fundamental variables (age, sex, formal, informal, mood, etc.) of the user of an idiom. Thus, as shown on the table the idioms in the Igbo language are used to express a wide range of socio-pragmatic information relating to individuals, events, states or situations such as: having mutual and friendly disposition, being truthful and very honest in giving information, being very accommodating, kind-hearted and merciful (1, 7, 19), being engrossed with unimaginable/untold hardship, being nonchalant, having attributes of wickedness, lacking transparency in dealing with others, putting up acts of pretence, exhibiting high sense of being in a hurry over things (3,4,5,6 and 8 respectively). Some other idioms express the ideas of one being tenacious to one's held beliefs to the point of swearing an oath to convince others, state of being shameless, having the tendency to steal, accumulating material possessions without having the tendency to give out to others willingly, having an insatiable appetite for acquiring material possessions, not being trustworthy, and being very unaccommodating (9,10,11,12,13, 14,15 and 16 respectively). Others are used to express the idea of: being easily irritated and provoked (17), being strongly willed to carry out any action that can surprise people (18), being able listen to instructions and yet not able to put them into use (20), being a talkative and thus cannot keep secret (21), being boastful (22), being rude and disrespectful especially to the elderly (23), being kind hearted, generous and ready to help others (24). There are still other idioms that reflect and encode the ideas of: someone being lucky and



easily favored by others (25), having unreliability of character (26), someone very stingy (27), having the feeling of thirst (28), someone who is dependent on others (29), a very courageous and brave person (30), a description of one who is not reliable in character (31), a description someone who looks weak and fragile physically but can accomplish great things (32) a description of someone who is in the habit of sleeping all the time to the point of being very lazy (33), a description someone who is unpredictable and cannot be relied upon (34) a portrayal of someone who is known to cause commotion wherever s/he is found (35), a description of courageous woman who is able to accomplish tasks which are usually associated with men (36), a description of personality (man or woman) of great accomplishments (38), a description of man of great personality who has lots of accomplishments to his credit (39), a description of someone who is a hypocrite, whose character cannot be vouched for by others (40). From the data presented (1-39), the idiomatic expressions in the Igbo language mainly fulfill the pragmatic function of asserting the belief system of the speakers, thereby functioning as one of the subcategories of Searle's (1969, 1976) speech acts, which is 'representative'.

They generally express the speakers' attitude and emotional state (irritation or anger; as in 3-6). The idioms can also convey an unfavorable, frivolous, a contemptuous, a lightly humorous or quietly mocking attitude towards a person or thing denoted by the idiom (cf. Cowie et al. 1984). Some others can make a comment, a complaint or issue a warning or make a prohibition

## **Conclusion**

The use of the idiomatic expressions in the Igbo language varies both according to the social groups or social characteristics of its users and the socio-cultural context or particular

occasions of use which the users of the idiom find themselves. Thus, each idiomatic structure has a pragmatic function and its occurrence is determined by a particular social and pragmatic setting (cf. Gramley and Patzold 1992). In concrete terms, the use of each of the idioms is dependent upon the situation, the topic, or the activity which is also reflected in the speaker's attitude toward the persons or events denoted and the social relationship between the participants in a communication exchange. The Igbo idiomatic expressions are complex expressions that reflect a wide range of information which may be structural, semantic, and socio-pragmatic which the user of a language must master in order to use them effectively.

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This paper has provided a preliminary semantic, structural and socio-pragmatic contextual analysis of idiomatic expressions in Igbo drawing data mainly from the Ngwa dialect of Igbo. It has also shown that Igbo idioms range from simple to complex syntactic structures of verb phrase and noun phrase constructions which reflect the extensive range of structural, semantic and socio-pragmatic information which anyone acquiring or learning Igbo must capture in order to master their usages effectively. It has been noted that just as in other languages of the world, an adequate description and treatment of idioms in Igbo has to take into account not only their syntax and semantics but also the socio-pragmatic contexts in which they used to perform euphemistic communicative functions of various types. The accurate and appropriate uses of the idioms presuppose a competence which is not only linguistic but also cultural.

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Scallops Anyone?



Rebecca Matheson

## *Diwomaodun*—The Sin of Being a Mixed Race

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Becoming a Communist Party member had been my mother's dream all her life. Although she strove for it, it didn't ever happen for her. She had complicated Jiating Chushen--family class status—which made it difficult for the Party to classify her. Party members were supposed to come from revolutionary, worker, or peasant families. Her father was from a wealthy land owning family, and he became a merchant after receiving his education in commerce at the end of Qing Dynasty. So my mother's family status belonged to the “petty bourgeois.”

Worse than the “petty bourgeois” family status, her father had two wives: a Chinese wife who also came from a wealthy family and a Japanese wife whose brother was a military officer in Japanese occupied Manchuria. Having two wives at the same time was illegal after New China was founded in 1949. But my grandfather had these two wives before the New Marriage Law passed in the People's Republic of China on May 1, 1950.

Instead of divorcing one, my grandfather decided to live with his Japanese wife in the city and leave his Chinese wife in the country, which left the children from both wives in a complicated family relationship, and this had a profound impact on their political future. Five children from both wives lived in the political shadow throughout the Cultural Revolution: they could never become Party members.

My mother used to work for a state-owned company. To be a Party member was not only prestigious, but also a requirement for important positions. With her father's business connections, she started her job as a book keeper at Harbin Qiulin Gongsi, an old brand name department store set up by the Russians soon after they started Chinese Eastern Railways, which connected Harbin to Vladivostok in 1896. In 1953, the Russians transferred ownership of the company to the Chinese government, but the company maintained its Russian style reputation right up until the present of 2019. My mother wanted to be an accountant from the first day she started working there. While raising two young children, she earned her accountancy certificate from a night school. However, when she applied for the accountant position, her application was rejected because that position required Party membership.

My mother was a diligent employee at work but not a qualified housewife at home. As a child, I admired two of my close friends whose mothers prepared homemade food for their lunch. One friend's mother worked at the same company with my mother, and the other friend's mother was an accountant. Neither mother seemed to be as busy as my mother. I become jealous of my friends whose mothers could spend more time with them. When we were having lunch together, they would always let me guess what their lunch was: fried rice, steam twisted rolls, green onion pancake, meat buns and sometimes



even dumplings (My memory of their lunch inspired me in my motherhood to prepare my daughter's lunch for her school). My childhood lunch was always the same because my mother had no time. There was no packing lunch business at my home. She and my dad would have lunch in their dining halls at work. She would give me 10 cents for my lunch each day. With ten cents in early 1960s, I could only afford seven cents for a fried dough and three cents for a bowl of soy drink. Occasionally, I could use my fried dough to exchange lunch with my friends so that I would have some homemade food. I seldom saw my mother doing housework. She either went to the night school for her accounting courses or stayed late at her work. Most of the time, my father prepared dinner and had dinner with me and my brother. By the time my mother came home from night school, we had already been in bed. Even on weekends, my mother was not around because her day off from work was Monday when we were at school. From my childhood memory, all my mother did was to work towards becoming a Party member, a steppingstone to be an accountant.

However, with her family background, my mother could never become a Party member no matter how hard she strove for it or how loyal she was to the Party. She inherited the family class status from her father but not her father's access and wealth. In 1950, the government took over privately owned business as part of the state-owned business, which was called public-private joint management. All her father's properties were confiscated by the state. To compensate him for the loss, the state offered him a petty job as a clerk in the city water company. He lived an ordinary life as most people did until the Great Cultural Revolution took place in 1966. Because his past business experience in Japan, he was detained for nine months as "a suspected enemy spy for

Imperial Japan." He was made to confess the unforgivable mistake he had made against the country by marrying a Japanese woman. To have connection with an enemy country, such as Japan, constituted the grave sin of Diwomaodun, which literally translates as "bearing a contradiction between an enemy and oneself." He was interrogated by the Red Guard about his marriage and his wife's family background in Japan. He revealed everything to the best of his knowledge. They did not believe his story about meeting his wife while she was working as a nurse in a hospital in Japan when he was a patient there in the early 1930s. He took this Japanese nurse to Shanghai before the Japanese invasion. He had to provide a witness, which he did. Being questioned about his residence in Harbin, my grandfather honestly told them how they had moved from Shanghai to Harbin just to be closer to his Japanese wife's brother, who was a Japanese military officer there. That admission really got him into trouble. During those days, anything politically incorrect from a family member could have a negative effect to the ninth generation. No matter what evidence or references he gave to the Red Guard, the criminal title of "a suspected enemy spy for Imperial Japan" was granted to him. He was made to confess and reflect on the connections he had with Ribenguizi, Japanese devil.

My Japanese grandmother sacrificed a lot for her marriage with my grandfather. At the age of twenty-one, she met my grandfather as her patient, and all she wanted to do with my grandfather was to ask him to take her to China where she had a brother in Northeast. Her real purpose in coming to China was to escape the parents-arranged marriage for her rather than marrying my grandfather who was twelve years older than her. When they got to Shanghai, my grandfather, who had a wife and daughter in his hometown and should have gone back to join them, instead decided to stay with this

young, Japanese girl until had handed her to her brother. When my grandmother found that she was staying with a married man, it was too late for her to leave my grandfather because she now found herself deeply in love with him. Because it was her initiative that got my grandfather in this relationship, she felt more guilty than cheated; she had no choice but to “marry” him. Later they moved to Harbin where her brother was in his compound. In the following years of their marriage, my grandfather mainly lived with her but visited his wife and they had two more children. Thus, he had five children with two women. The half-blood siblings knew one another only through pictures until the Chinese grandmother passed away.

On August 15, 1945, the Japanese emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of the Imperial Japan, which brought the hostility of World War II to a close, but started the aversion between the two nations. While China celebrated the victory of defeating Japan, the atrocities caused by the Japanese invasion were revealed and announced by the Chinese media. As a business man in Japan for a couple of years before he met my grandmother, he saw how Japan became stronger as a military country. They were triumphant over the victory of the first Sino-Japanese war. Now they were defeated by the Chinese for the second one, their pride would turn into resentment. From his own experience in Japan, he knew that the Japanese would have an equally strong aversion to the Chinese. When my grandmother’s brother was forced to go back to Japan, he wanted to take her back with him. It would be a good opportunity for my grandmother to join her family in Japan and for my grandfather to leave China to avoid the humiliation later in his life. However, my grandfather determined that he wouldn’t spend the rest of his life in Japan nor would he let my grandmother go with their two children. When my

grandmother’s brother came to their place, my grandfather managed to hide his wife and children.

My grandmother had to give up all her connections to her Japanese family after Japan was defeated and driven out of China in 1945. She saw how the country celebrated its victory over Japan and how hateful the Chinese became when talking about the Japanese. After the expulsion of the Japanese from China, the couple moved to a neighbourhood where there were Chinese-Japanese mixed families and several Russian families. The children of the two Chinese-Japanese families did not get along well with each other or with the children of the Russian families. The children of the other Chinese-Japanese family were arrogant towards my mother and her siblings because their step father was a Chinese official working at Harbin Railway Bureaus. Their own father left China at the end of war, leaving them with their mother in China. It was their step father who raised them but they were Japanese in blood. The children of the Russian families were as arrogant as the Japanese ones because their parents came to help China to defeat Japan. But my grandmother got along well with the other Japanese mother: the two Japanese mothers enjoyed chatting in Japanese when their children were at school. Neither family spoke Japanese to their children and nobody wanted to mention any Japanese relation to their children. Half-blood Chinese was no good at all but half-blood Japanese was the worst.

In 1956, the Japanese government sponsored Japanese in China to go back to Japan and my grandmother decided to visit her parents there. My grandfather arranged for her to take only their son. Their daughter would stay with him. After half a year in Japan, my grandmother had to come back, and for the second time she lost the opportunity to

return to Japan. But that was exactly what my grandfather had hoped for.

My grandmother was wise, humorous and optimistic. She taught herself to become a tailor specializing in making costumes for professional performers. She turned their two bedroom house into a tailor shop where five Japanese women worked for her. Most of their orders were from actors, actresses, and ladies whose husbands were high officials. As a friendly gesture, she also took orders from her neighbours with discount even though their orders were just for ordinary garments which my grandmother wouldn't take if they had not been of their neighbours. She also told her employees to treat their neighbours well. Luckily enough, all her employees married Chinese under various circumstances. As my grandmother told them, "we are okay in China because our men are their people. We are protected in one way or another." Whenever I went to her place, I would always see the grandmothers busy working with their sewing machines, their laughs blending well with the rhythms of the sewing machines. My Japanese wasn't good enough to understand what they were laughing about.

In 2010, my partner and I visited my grandmother in Japan, she tried to communicate with us in a mixture of Japanese and Chinese, "I was treated well during my 40 years in China even though I was Japanese. Unfortunately my husband was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution because he was 'bearing a contradiction between an enemy and oneself.'" My grandmother's Chinese reached to a level well above survival needs. She also acquired some of the political vocabularies. She spoke to my partner in Chinese and asked me to interpret for him, "You will be okay in China because Canadians are never the enemy to China." She urged my partner to learn to speak Chinese as she did, "if I

didn't learn to speak Chinese, I wouldn't be so well received and protected by the Chinese people. You love my granddaughter, you must learn her language." She also mentioned that her marriage with my grandfather brought pains to the other grandmother and the five half-blood siblings.

My grandfather always told his children that he had enough punishment for his "silly" love for their Japanese mother. If they needed to disown him for political reasons, he would understand and accept their decision. When he was detained, all of his children were made to declare that they had made a clean break from their family otherwise their own children would be affected by this relation even though no one was never accepted even as a probationary Party member. My mother had always been a model worker at her company and in 1956 she even became a model worker at the city level. Her portrait was on the front page of the Harbin Daily. She kept the newspaper, and still has it. But her regret at not becoming a Party member stayed with her forever.

My mother learned her lesson about the difficulty of obtaining Party membership, so she tried to keep her family stories to herself. As a child, I was curious about the skeletons in the cupboard. During the famine years between 1959 and 1961 when there was not enough food in the city, I was sent to the country to be raised by my Chinese grandmother and my uncle. There was not much in my memories of those three years when I lived with my Chinese grandmother because I went there at two and came back at five. But I still remembered that my grandfather took me back from the country by train. People often made fun of my Shandong accent by asking me questions. When I answered their questions, they all laughed.

Coming back to live with my parents in the city, I had to stay at home by myself

during the weekend because my parents had to work. Before the Cultural Revolution, I spent most of the weekends there with my grandfather and grandmother at their house near the river bank. I loved to watch grandfather's fish in the aquarium. I played with the bean bags that Grandmother made for me out of the odds and ends of the costume fabrics. I enjoyed the walk with my grandparents along the river bank. My grandfather would speak Chinese to me but Japanese to my grandmother. My grandmother would speak Chinese to me in a weird accent, "You see the monument there. It was set up after the flood in 1957. That year, you were born, and we couldn't take you and your mum home from the hospital because of the flood."

I wasn't allowed to visit grandparents during the week. Only in summer and winter vacations, occasionally I was allowed to go to live with them. Grandmother would ask me to say hello to Wang Laolao (maternal grandmother), Li Laolao, Zhang Laolao, Zhao Laolao, and Yang Laolao. Later I know that all these grandmothers used their husbands' last names to identify them in the public.

As a child, whenever I asked my mother why I had two grandmothers from one grandfather, she would say, "That's the legacy from the old China." I didn't understand the differences between Old China and New China until I was in the second year of elementary school when the Great Cultural Revolution took place. We were taught at school that we must destroy the Four Olds: old ideology, old culture, old customs and old habits. We all learnt to shout the slogans: "We must bring down monsters and freaks (all sorts of bad people) and never let them rise up." All we saw each day was the humiliation done to the monsters and freaks in public. Those "bad people" were forced to have big plaits hanging in front of their chests which were identified with their titles such as

anti-revolutionary, capitalist roader (representative of the capitalist class), traitor and collaborator etc. To make them more noticeable, they were made to wear high hats made of paper with their names crossed out in red. I guess that my grandfather must belong to the traitor and collaborator with Japanese when he was humiliated like this. Worse than that, he had two wives, which really was from the Old Culture: rich men would have more than one wife and the worst of all, one of his wives was Japanese.

I had no detailed stories about my grandparents during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1977) because we were not allowed to visit them except during Chinese New Year. There was no people working at their place any more. One year, grandfather was not at home for the New Year. Later I heard from my mother that he was put in jail but was released when it was found out that he went to Japan only for commercial businesses. Luckily, my grandmother was well protected by her neighbours but she stopped her private business which was considered to be capitalist.

In China, for official forms, everyone must fill up the blank of Jiating Chushen, family background, which is identified with your father's social position. In terms of Jiating Chushen, a Chinese grandmother would cause much less trouble than a Japanese one because any Chinese related "sin" would be classified as Renminnibumaodun or "the contradictions between our own people." So as children, we were told that our Chinese grandmother passed away a long time ago and that our Japanese grandmother was actually our step grandmother. My mother couldn't visit her parents often during the Cultural Revolution.

My grandparents' home was the same as most of our friends' homes. Chairman Mao's portrait was hanging on the wall above the dining table. We stood in front of it and



said grace before him at each meal. My grandmother cooked Chinese food and dressed as a Chinese woman. No one could tell that she was Japanese except when she talked in her Japanese accented Chinese. I did not notice any Japanese identity in my mother either. Physically she had Chinese features except for an eagle-beaked nose and high cheekbones, which she claimed to have inherited from her father. Indeed, my grandfather looked more like a Laowai, a white foreigner than my Japanese grandmother. My mother never spoke any Japanese in front of her children even though she understood some.

My mother always told me with a sigh when I was growing up, “If I were a Party member, I would be an accountant. I hope you will become a Party member because that is the only way you will succeed in your career.” When I was eighteen and had finished middle school, I answered Chairman Mao’s call to go down to the countryside to receive the re-education from the peasants. To become a Party member was a great honour for my generation. In my application for Party membership, I put in “middle peasant family” as my Jiating Chushen, which I had inherited from my father. For “kinship or family ties,” I put in my two cousins from my father’s side, who were already Party members, but did not mention my mother’s family. In the remarks column where I was asked whether I had hidden anything from the Party, I wrote nothing. I knew that my grandfather had been considered “a suspected enemy spy for Imperial Japan,” but towards the end of the Cultural Revolution, the government revoked this title because of the many wrongdoings the Red Guard had committed generally against the people.

I still remembered my grandmother’s excitement over the news that grandfather’s political issue was to be readdressed. She invited everyone home for a family dinner and told her kids, “Your father is not ‘a suspected enemy spy for Imperial Japan.’” Grandfather

also received a lump sum of his nine-month salary while he was put in jail. With that money, he decided to take grandmother to Shanghai and revisited the places they had lived at in early 1930s.

Grandmother showed me some of their pictures in black and white when I visited her in Japan: one of the pictures they had was in front of the Huangpu River Harbor at the end of Broadway Road. At their back was a cruise ship. My grandmother was leaning slightly against my grandfather with her contented smile. My grandmother told me that the ship they took from Japan to Shanghai wasn’t as good as this one. Actually they had to come to Shanghai through Pusan in South Korea. It took them five days to get to Shanghai from Osaka. Another picture was taken in the hotel of Waldorf Astoria on the Bund. My grandmother was standing on the stairways waving her hand. Obviously she was waving at my grandfather who took the picture for her. My grandmother showed me and my partner her photo albums when we visited her in Japan. She told me that my grandfather was very handsome and nice. When they arrived in Shanghai, all my grandfather wanted to do was to put her in a good hotel so that he could contact her brother in Harbin to get her. He told her that he had a wife and a daughter at home. He couldn’t bring her home unless his wife would accept her. My grandmother was liberal but not enough to live with his wife and daughter together. So in the end my grandmother decided to live with my grandfather in Harbin, agreeing that my grandfather would still take care of his wife and their children.

In New China, the politically right family background is crucial if you want to become a Party member, which would offer privileges for you to apply for a professional or an official position. With such a complicated family background, it was very difficult

for my mother and her siblings to join the party. I also believed in the Party's stated policy that individual performance was a more important qualification than family class status. In order to meet the qualifications for Party membership, I strictly disciplined myself by being selfless and hardworking.

The farm I was working on had about 300 youths, mostly from the same city. I wanted to be a working model for my peers. My motto was to be the first to endure hardship and to be the last to enjoy comforts. We lived in a very humble dormitory with around 20 people in a room. It was a communal life: we worked together in the fields during the day, and ate together in the dining halls in the evening. I helped those who fell behind working in the fields. After a day of hard work I volunteered to be a kitchen helper or a dormitory care taker whenever I was needed. I dressed myself as humbly as possible, and I got along well with all my peers. I regularly submitted my report to the Party about my thinking and performance. For a full year, my good deeds were recognized by the Party and they started to seriously consider my application. I was required to provide contact information for my parents and relatives so that they could do a family background check. I was so excited while waiting for the family background clearance. Finally I would get Party membership and my mother would be so proud of me! When the red paper notice with the list of the probationary Party members was put up on the dining room wall, my name was not there! I was so shocked I burst into tears in front of the youth onsite. Later the Party secretary told me that I had lied to the Party. My mother's company's reference letter revealed that my mother was of mixed Chinese-Japanese blood. This was the first I had ever heard that I was one quarter Japanese. My "step" grandmother was in fact my real grandmother. I continued to bear the burden of

my grandfather's "sin" of Diwomadun.

The Party secretary told me that it was possible for them to reconsider my application if I could prove that I was loyal to the Party. I had to trust the Party and worked even harder than before to "cleanse my soul." Throughout my life on the farm, I put all my heart and soul into serving the Party and the people. Two more years passed and more people were accepted but never me. I still carried out my obligations and duties without hesitation. Finally after four years, I was accepted as a probationary Party member. When I took the vow in front of the Party flag with my right fist raised, tears were running down my cheeks. I told my mother the good news and she wrote me, "I am very proud of you. You have realized my dream!" I was the first Party member in our family, and I opened the door for my siblings and even for my mother's siblings to join the Party. I had cleared the family name and made it possible for everyone in the family to become Party members. A few years later, my brother, an army officer, and my mother's two siblings got their Party memberships.

Thirty years after that vow, when I took a vow in becoming a Canadian citizen, I shed no tears. Instead, I felt guilty about losing my Chinese citizenship. When I called my mother to express my feelings about making a second vow in my life, she told me, "I am happy for you rather than proud of you." She also asked me whether I was afraid of being a Canadian if I were to go back to China. I said, "No." But I realized my mother was afraid there might be another Cultural Revolution in China in which foreigners might be persecuted. This fear was deeply engrained. When my daughter and I took our Laowai partners back home to visit her, she told the neighbours, "The older one is my daughter's colleague at the university and the younger one is their student."

Having witnessed my grandfather's persecution and undergone the whole process of joining the Party, I understand my mother's cautions. My daughter, who left China when she was fifteen, was familiar with the consequences of my grandfather marrying a Japanese wife. She said to my mother, "Grandma, you don't have to be afraid for us, we married Canadians." I was afraid that she would say something to hurt my mother such as "We didn't marry Japanese as your father did." Later when we told the story of my mother's white lie at a family dinner table, both our husbands admired my mother's wisdom in surviving well in China. My partner had already heard my grandmother say, "Like mother, like daughter. Both women are wise." He also asked me to tell my mother, "In Canada, mix-race is common. My father is Austrian and my mother is Ukrainian."

Strangely, the Chinese-Japanese mixed race issue followed me to Canada. One day in 2006 my daughter came home from a demonstration at the University of Manitoba against a Japanese historian who still denied Japan's invasion of China. She said very excitedly, "Whenever I think of Japanese invaders in China and their flag--that red sun on a white sky-- I despise and loathe them all." I tried to explain that it was not the Japanese people who invaded China, but warlike decision makers. She was so irrational at that moment that she retorted very rudely to me, "Don't expect any sympathy from me for your mother's family." I was shocked.

That night after dinner when we both calmed down, I asked my daughter why she had all the grudges against my mother's family. Here is what she told me, "Both grandmother and you have worked so hard to prove that you are good people. Grandma retired with regret because she had never been an accountant just because of her father's stupid mistake in marrying a Japanese wife. I have never seen your grandfather and

grandmother. I don't know them in person. But isn't it a fact that your grandmother's brother was a military officer in Manchuria?"

"Yes, but it doesn't mean that my grandmother was an invader. She was innocent," I said in a peaceful tone.

"Didn't she escape the parent-arranged marriage just because the boy was a coward who refused to be recruited as a soldier?" My daughter knew all the story about my grandmother because I was writing the family saga.

It had been sixty years since the end of the war and we were now living in different eras and countries. However, in thinking about the half-blood Japanese and Chinese, I realized that my daughter had received all kinds of propaganda about the Japanese during her childhood in China: the Japanese were considered "devils." They were all looters and killers. While in the Western education, the Japanese Samurai denote the aristocratic warriors, the Japanese military officers with their swords and boots are the evil symbol for war crimes in Chinese education. This kind of hateful propaganda had been instilled in two or three generations of Chinese. In this environment, who would ever want to admit to having Japanese blood? It would be very hard indeed. This thought came home to me even more after I heard from my Japanese-Canadian friend how her eight-year-old daughter once told her, "My Chinese classmate doesn't want me to be her friend because my mother is Japanese." My heart aches."





Texture #3

Rebecca Matheson

## ***FILM REVIEW:***

### ***The Cotton Club* (1984): From a Time When Black Lives Did Not Matter (Much)**

**Etienne Boumans**

**Independent Scholar**

After *The Godfather* (1972), and its sequel *The Godfather: Part II* (1974), filmmakers were convinced that movies using the mafia as an audience-titillating showpiece could make lots of money.<sup>1</sup> The 1984 film *The Cotton Club* is inspired by the 1977 picture book of the same name by author of black history James Haskins, bearing the subtitle: *A Pictorial and Social History of the Most Famous Symbol of the Jazz Era*. Based on Haskins' portrait of the legendary cabaret, expectations were high and manifold, yet the movie fails to

1. Carlos E. Cortes, "The Hollywood Curriculum on Italian Americans: Evolution of an Icon of Ethnicity." Tomasi, Lydio F, Piero Gastaldo, Thomas Row. *The Columbus People*. New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1994, 100.



fulfil them. Although *The Cotton Club* went through the hands of producer Robert Evans, who—due to production problems—panicked into taking Coppola on board late in the production process, the movie turned out to be a box office failure.<sup>2</sup> The film cost is estimated at 47 million USD at the time of making, well above estimates.

*The Cotton Club* is both a musical and a gangster drama. These two genres carry two parallel stories, juxtaposing real-life and fictitious characters: one involving the brothers Dwyer (Richard Gere and Nicolas Cage) and white mobsters, including Owney Madden (Bob Hoskins) who is the owner of the Cotton Club; and another one around a pair of tap dancing brothers (Gregory and Maurice Hines) who are signed up at the Cotton Club, and their milieu. But the parallel stories do not effectively intertwine, or when they occasionally do, there is no organic relationship with the fundamentals of the film.

While segregation had been abolished since the mid-1960s, racial integration of film subject matter had not yet been accomplished, and *The Cotton Club* was not a very successful attempt either. For the film had its own racial difficulties: white film fans were known rarely to attend pictures on black themes or with black actors, and so Richard Gere was engaged to interpret the leading role. Yet, in the absence of white entertainers at the Cotton Club, the incorporation of a white jazz musician (embodied by Richard Gere) turned out to be a real brain racker. No wonder Kennedy and Coppola produced some thirty to forty script versions. It was the result of the filmmakers' commercial choice to introduce white actors of renown to ensure that white moviegoers would come and see the movie. Thus, an intrinsically black narrative was 'whitewashed' out of fear for commercial failure—in vain as it turned out.

2. James M. Welsh, Gene D. Phillips, Rodney F. Hill, *The Francis Ford Coppola Encyclopedia*, 60.

Another dubious choice, which may be considered a mishap, is the competition between Irish, Jewish and Italian mobsters as the key feature of the movie, while black-and-white opposition is relegated to furtive dialogue snippets of racial abuse; subject matters like institutionalized racism and racial segregation are not deepened, let alone criticized, and rather light-heartedly trivialized. Harlem itself looks cosy and sanitized and never steps out of the studio environment it was produced in, which deprives the movie of a fair amount of street credibility.

The most iconic venue of Harlem's night entertainment in those days was probably the Cotton Club, featuring black performers for curious white patrons, the flavour of which was evocated by the movie *The Cotton Club*. Historically speaking, a much-favoured decor at the Cotton Club was the jungle theme, illustrating the era's fixation with the so-called primitivism of the African American. This cinematic aesthetic theme went hand in hand with Duke Ellington's *Jungle music*.<sup>3</sup> It was thought to be a remedy for success much like the 1920s spectacles by Josephine Baker in Paris, and the *Native villages* at successive World Fairs in those years. Band leader and entertainer Cab Calloway described the stage even as "a replica of a southern mansion, with large white columns and a backdrop painted with weeping willows and slave quarters."<sup>4</sup> Thus, the concept of the Cotton Club cabaret personified not the South of the upper class but that of "the Negro." Against such a background, the love story between Sandman (Gregory Hines) and Lila Rose (Lonette McKee) appeared like a meta-"plantation romance." While this neo-primitivism was a key feature of modernist culture, the movie did not convincingly

3. Tricia Welsh, "Killing Them with Tap Shoes: Violent Performance in *The Cotton Club*." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, 25:4 (1998), 165.

4. Alyn Shipton, *Hi-De-Ho: The Life of Cab Calloway*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, 37.

bring it to the fore, let alone did it challenge its representation. Apparently, the 1980s were way too early times to expect the movie industry to produce racial counternarratives.

The revolting fact that blacks could perform at the Cotton Club but were largely deprived of access as clients could have carried as much weight as Gere's storyline. There are several scenes that address racial relationships, though they are hardly developed, such as a brief love story between Sandman and "chocolate chanteuse" Lila Rose, a fair-skinned 'tragic mulatto,' reminiscent of Lena Horne. This story explores the limits of racial identity, without finding a solution. As in conservative Hollywood films, the socially ambitious African American is often drawn back to the black community: Lila successfully passes as white at a Midtown club only to return to her black lover in the end, which could be interpreted as a suggestion to "stay where you are." According to Ed Guerrero, Hines and McKee had to insist that the scenes of black romance be retained, suggesting that Hollywood moviemakers prefer to ignore black love.<sup>5</sup> Also, by treating blacks as though there is no diversity or difference of opinion, Coppola portrays a romantic picture of the black community which can be construed as socially regressive. In support to this criticism, Coppola ends his movie with a nerve-racking crosscutting sequence of the Cotton Club and New York's Grand Central Station, with happy and dancing white and black folks.

*The Cotton Club* creates a pleasant visual style (Art deco and *film noir*), but due to the multitude of characters and storylines, all fighting for attention, the result is somewhat confusing. In the words of *TIME* reviewer Corliss: "There is too much geometry here,

5. Guerrero, Ed. *Framing Blackness. The African American Image in Film*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993, p 145.

and too little chemistry".<sup>6</sup> Yet there is some consistency in the treatment of characters, since both white and black characters are as flat as an ironing board. In the end, due to lack of interracial interaction, we never get to see how the black entertainers—all in secondary roles—and the white patrons feel about each other. Also, contrary to what one could expect, the movie does not create a tribute to black entertainers, who seem to be a mere alibi to introduce loads of white mobsters and Caucasian patrons from downtown Manhattan, and only part of the time in Harlem's most famous nightclub, less a subject than a mood. A decade after indie *blaxploitation* genre movies reshaped African American representations and introduced black heroes and heroines, *The Cotton Club* not even remotely dealt with racial discrimination issues in the segregation era. Compared to other jazz movies like Clint Eastwood's *Bird* (1988), Bertrand Tavernier's *'Round Midnight* (1986), or even Martin Ritt's *Paris Blues* (1961), *The Cotton Club* is nothing less than a cinematic racial backlash, and, therefore, worth (re-)watching from today's perspective. By refraining from paying tribute to entertainers from the African diaspora, Coppola and his lot clearly missed an opportunity to update racial equality thinking and bring a message of hope to ethnically deprived groups, by failing to state, in the racially promising 1980s, that 'Black Lives Matter.'

6. Richard Corliss, "Once Upon a Time in Harlem." *TIME*, 17 Dec. 1984. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,923849-1,00.html>, accessed on 16 Nov. 2018.

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Texture #4

Rebecca Matheson

## ***FILM REVIEW:***

### **The Hollow Christ, His Brittle Glory, and His Sour Cross<sup>1</sup>: *The Hollow Crown's* Representation of Shakespeare's Richard of Bordeaux as a Counterfeit of Christ**

**Josh Commander**

**Independent Scholar**

Upon entering Richard II's golden pavilion in the British Broadcasting Company's production, *The Hollow Crown: Richard II* (2012), the first face the camera encounters is not Richard's (Ben Whishaw)—but a monkey's. Throughout the ensuing scene in which Richard sentences Bolingbroke (Rory Kinnear) and Mowbray (James Purefoy) to exile, not only is the monkey fussing over himself continuously, but Richard also fawns over him by feeding him grapes and fondly attending more to the monkey's antics than to Mowbray or Bolingbroke. Indeed, the scene closes penultimately by panning out on Richard and

1. Shakespeare IV.i.231, 277.



the monkey alone in the pavilion and finally by ending the scene as it began: on another close-up of the monkey's face. On first look, this addition of the monkey appears to be nothing more than a frivolous touch on the part of BBC; on closer inspection, however, the monkey is shown to be nothing less than a fitting analogue of Richard. Not unlike how Richard is represented in both William Shakespeare's play and BBC's production, the monkey is interested only in what directly concerns himself, in opportunely seizing what is up for grabs, and in mimicking his master. Richard, in turn, proves to be nothing other than an apish<sup>2</sup> imitation of "the suffering Christ, consoling himself with the comparison and deriving from it a certain grandeur" even whilst Aumerle and his men "bend their bows / of double-fatal yew against" him (Maus 978-9, Shakespeare III.ii.12-13). By examining *The Hollow Crown's* decision to alter Shakespeare's storyline in order to emphasize the parallelism between Shakespeare's hollow (and unhallowed) Christ and the mythologized original, we will find this interpretation not only well-grounded, but we will also unearth suggestions of just such an interpretation embedded in the lines of Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Richard the Second*.

In "Richard II and the Unforgetting Messiah" (2015), Doug Eskew argues that there is a long tradition of critics acknowledging Richard as a Christ-like figure in Shakespeare's text, but that any analysis of that symbolic echoing almost uniformly ends at that passing observation. Eskew himself employs a "theory of the messianic" to situate Shakespeare among other writers in literary and theological tradition who have identified "modes of self-forgetting and analogy" as messianic traits, but the scope of Eskew's essay, like those

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2. BBC's use of this analogy is in keeping with common parlance in early modern England: the term "apish" was widely used to denote "base imitation" (for a corresponding quote directly pertaining to Richard, see II.i.22-23).

of his predecessors, does not include a thorough examination of the symbolic strains that link Richard to Christ nor an analysis of the ramifications of that link (307). Considering this relative dearth of attention given to Richard's symbolic associations to Christ in the body of criticism on Shakespeare's text, it is therefore not altogether unsurprising that reviewers of *The Hollow Crown's* adaptation would fail to fully grasp how the film's apparent departures from the text in order to accentuate Richard's messianic associations are actually—albeit slantingly—grounded in the text of the play. In their reviews of the adaptation, both Andrew Billen (2012) and Patrick Carnegy (2012) separately identify Richard as a "Christ-like figure" crucified in "St Sebastian-style" (Carnegy 45; Billen 16). In otherwise favorable reviews of the production, both acknowledge that some viewers might find the presentation of the messianic theme overdone, but neither examine the significance of that thematic portrayal nor pay tribute to its origins in Shakespeare's play. In a double review of BBC's and RSC's productions of *Richard II* (2013), Arlynda Boyer takes her critique of *The Hollow Crown's* Christly representation of Richard a step further by labeling it "heavy-handed," maintaining that "the BBC film creates its interpretation only through some odd, seemingly pointless cuts and alterations" (3, 2). Boyer's chief example of these alterations is the BBC's decision to relocate the scenes textually placed in Pomfret to the Tower, which she deems "nonsensical" (4). Not unlike the traditional lack of attention given to Richard's analogous relationship to Christ in the text, reviewers of *The Hollow Crown's* adaptation have likewise neglected to understand the filmmakers' textual basis for their interpretation of Richard irrespective of their concomitant modifications to the play—modifications that are, nevertheless, suggested by the text itself.

As Shakespeare's text clearly indicates, Bolingbroke orders for Richard to be "convey[ed] ... to the Tower," but shortly thereafter Northumberland informs Richard: "the mind of Bolingbroke is changed. / You must to Pomfret, not unto the Tower" (IV.i.306, V.i.52-3). In *The Hollow Crown's* rendition of *Richard II*, however, Richard is brought to the Tower of London in a manner that is hauntingly reminiscent of Jesus Christ's path to crucifixion. In the film, Richard must endure, like Christ, his own version of the Via Dolorosa<sup>3</sup> as he is depicted being harried, and intermittently dragged, by soldiers as he attempts to speak with his wife (Clémence Poésy). After the Queen is escorted away, Richard remains in the Tower as "rude misgoverned hands from the windows' tops / [Throw] dust and rubbish on King Richard's head" and person, which "gentle Richard ... with such gentle sorrow ... [shakes] off" to the backdrop of tumultuous hoots and jeers (Shakespeare V.ii.5-6, 28, 31; *Hollow Crown*). The manner in which Richard patiently suffers this is startling consistent with how Christ is described to uncomplainingly tolerate the Romans spitting at, chanting at, and mocking him (Mark 15.14, 19-20).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the camera zooms in on Richard's bare feet splashing through filth, calling to mind Christ's own barefoot trek to Golgotha, which Shakespeare's text anticipates when the Bishop of Carlisle prophesies that England will "be called / The field of Golgotha" as a result of Richard's deposition (IV.i.134-5).

While it is *The Hollow Crown*, and not Shakespeare, that has Richard all but inhumed beneath the Tower in order to evoke the imagery of Christ's tomb, it is Shakespeare's text that recurrently draws allusions to this self-same tomb and suggests the Tower as

3. Latin for "Way of Grief."

4. The Biblical citation used here references the *Tyndale New Testament* as that is said to be the translation that Shakespeare was most influenced by and familiar with.

an apt place of death for Richard. When Harry Percy corrects Bolingbroke by telling him that Flint Castle "doth contain a king," he does so by saying that "King Richard *lies* / Within the limits of yon lime and stone"<sup>5</sup> (III.iii.24-5). Not only are lime and stone the same materials that were used to build London's Tower and tombs in general,<sup>6</sup> but the diction used to convey this message is also undoubtedly charged with the image of Richard being entombed. This image is only further reinforced in the same scene when Northumberland (David Morrissey) relays to Richard that Bolingbroke swears by Edward III's "honourable tomb" and "the buried hand of" Gaunt that he merely wants his lands and titles back; and again in the next scene when Richard says that he himself will "soon *lie* ... in an earthy pit";<sup>7</sup> and yet again in the succeeding scene when the Queen, in a street adjacent to the Tower of London (and actually within the Tower in the film), refers to Richard's body as "King Richard's Tomb" (III.iii.104-8, IV.i.209, V.i.12; *Hollow Crown*). In the very same breath that she refers to "Richard's Tomb," the Queen also points "the way / to Julius Caesar's ill-erected Tower," thereby obliquely associating the one with the other;<sup>8</sup> perhaps more importantly, though, is the reference to Caesar that effectively serves to link Christ, Richard, Christ's tomb, the Tower, Judas-like betrayal, and assassination all together (V.i.1-2).

Not only does Julius Caesar share the same initials with Jesus Christ,<sup>9</sup> he was also, like Christ (and not unlike how Richard believed he himself would be),<sup>10</sup> deified

5. Emphasis imposed.

6. Moreover, *limestone* is used to make *tombstones*.

7. Emphasis imposed.

8. In fact, a *tower* is prefigured as a symbol of Richard's doom in the very first scene since it is Bolingbroke's symbol of hope: "Strong as a tower in hope, I cry 'Amen!'"—a hope that is most certainly realized (I.iii.102).

9. Incidentally, both Christ and Richard were allegedly 33 upon their deaths, whereas Caesar was their ages combined at the time of his death.

10. Since he claims he will "win a new world's [heaven's] crown" upon his death (5.1.24).

after his death. Even more pertinent, however, is the fact that Caesar was betrayed and assassinated, just as Richard was, on the pretense of not recalling a noble from exile by one of the people closest to him: Marcus Brutus (Plutarch's "Marcus"). Brutus was to Caesar as Judas was to Christ—just as Aumerle (Tom Hughes) is to Richard in *The Hollow Crown's* interpretation of Shakespeare's text. But even though it is *The Hollow Crown* that explicitly exploits Aumerle as another Judas by having him—instead of Sir Piers Exton—assassinate Richard, it is nevertheless Shakespeare's text that planted the seed of this notion that so successfully flowered in the film. After all, in Shakespeare's text Aumerle retracts his allegiance to Richard (much like Brutus and Judas) for a self-serving reason (in Aumerle's case, to preserve his life): "I do repent me. Read not my name there" (V.iii.50). Shakespeare therefore already renders Aumerle a minor Judas. Indeed, the theme of Judas and betrayal courses throughout Shakespeare's text: Richard mistakenly labels some of the only men who (albeit inadvertently) die for him—the Earl of Wiltshire, Bushy, and Green—"three Judases, each one thrice-worse than Judas" before Scroop corrects him. What is more, Richard declaims to the court that they betrayed him as "Judas did to Christ"—the principle difference being that, where Christ "in twelve / Found truth in all but one, [Richard], in twelve thousand, none" (III.ii.128, IV.i.161-2). *The Hollow Crown's* decision to place the arrow in Aumerle's hand was merely an artful way to further emphasize Richard's correlation to Christ by establishing a primary Judas in the film and, in so doing, ascribing a poignantly layered meaning—which served to foreshadow Richard's assassination—to Aumerle's statement to Bolingbroke, "My heart is not confederate with my hand" (*Hollow Crown*, Shakespeare V.iii.51). As we will see, however, the quarrel that flew from Aumerle's hand in the film flew from Shakespeare's

hand first.

We have seen that, despite *The Hollow Crown* having modified both Shakespeare's place of Richard's death and the issuer of that same death, the originary ideas for such an interpretation can be found in Shakespeare's text—and so too can the modified instrument of death utilized in *The Hollow Crown*: the bow and quarrel. According to Mario DiGangi in *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*, "[t]raditional exegesis and iconography permitted homoerotic interpretations of certain figures, most notably ... St. Sebastian and the disciple John (both of whom paired with Jesus)" and that "[t]hese traditions were well known to Renaissance English writers," so it is therefore not surprising that Shakespeare would have no qualms about superimposing Messianic symbolism upon a homoerotic figure like Richard II (20). DiGangi moves on to note that "[i]n Italian Renaissance paintings, this saint [Sebastian] who sacrificed himself for the love of Christ is commonly portrayed as a naked Apollonian figure suggestively penetrated by arrows" and that, "for seventeenth-century English poets" like Shakespeare "Christ himself becomes the focus of homoerotic passion," which thus provides supportive rationale as to why Shakespeare would claim (via Bolingbroke) that Richard had homosexual relations with Bushy and Green (DiGangi 20, Shakespeare III.i.11-15). DiGangi's text therefore serves to explain why *The Hollow Crown* would use the ingenious device of incorporating a protracted visual of Bushy (Ferdinand Kingsley) painting none other than St. Sebastian pierced with three arrows (thereby foreshadowing Richard's manner of death in the film) whilst Richard lingeringly fondles the Adonis-like model's artificial wound, followed by Richard intimately caressing Bushy's shoulder as their eyes lock—until they are interrupted by a

visibly chagrined Queen. Moreover, Bushy's painting of St. Sebastian resurfaces once again in the film during the Queen's conversation with the artist, where the latter so fittingly delivers his verbal tour de force: "Like perspectives, which, rightly gazed upon, / Show nothing but confusion; eyed awry, / Distinguish form"—an observation which also applies to the means by which Shakespeare slantingly alludes to the arrows of St. Sebastian (II.ii.18-20).

In *Richard II*, the term "quarrel" recurrently darts in and out of the text, superficially used to refer to its newest meaning in early modern English vernacular at the time (a dispute), but also figuratively alluding to its primary and oldest meaning (an arrow) in order to highlight the feathered and flinty theme of archery bolting throughout the text. When Gaunt tells Lady Gloucester, "Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven, / Who, when they see the hours ripe on earth, / Will rain hot vengeance on offenders' heads," he is simultaneously saying that they will yield Richard's and his minions' punishment up to Providence and let God guide their arrow's course, which Gaunt once again reiterates to Lady Gloucester—"God's is the quarrel"—with the same double-meaning being employed in the same scene and elsewhere (I.ii.6-8, 37; I.iii.13, 33; II.i.249). This theme is also reinforced via the term "dart," a term synonymous with "quarrel": Shakespeare's wordplay is apparent when York tells his wife that "[s]o many greedy looks of young and old / Through casements darted their desiring eyes" (V.ii.14). because medieval archers would shoot darts from windows (and through a castle's crenellations and arrow loops) upon their foe by drawing the arrow to an eye to aim—the word eye being an archer's term for the part of the bowstring that attaches to the upper horn of a bow. When

Richard responds to Aumerle by telling him that God "darts his light<sup>11</sup> through every guilty hole," he is obliquely (and unconsciously) echoing Gaunt's assertion that God will direct his arrows' trajectory and alluding to the vertical holes or slats in castle walls (arrow loops) referenced above (III.ii.39).

Shakespeare's subtle stroke of slipping in the theme of archery becomes especially ironic when we find that it is at Flint Castle where Richard first submits to Bolingbroke, because flint is the stone most commonly used to make arrowheads. This is further accented with yet another double-meaning when the Gardener, in the subsequent scene, reports to the Queen that "King Richard is in the mighty hold / Of Bolingbroke" (III. iv.84-5), since the word hold is an archer's term which refers to the bowstring being drawn (held) and the arrow aimed at its target before release. In other words, Richard is not just Bolingbroke's captive, but also his quarry—and held in his sights. If it were not for the recurrent thread of archery in the text, the term flint would be somewhat out of place when the Queen recalls Caesar's manner of death by referring to the "flint bosom" of both Caesar and the Tower, because while flint undoubtedly was used in the building of the Tower, Caesar's bosom was pierced with steel (via daggers) in his assassination, not flint. The comparison proves apt, however, when we recognize that Shakespeare's intent is to simultaneously call to mind St. Sebastian's flint-riddled bosom and fashion yet another link between Richard, Caesar, and Christ (V.i.3). This allusion is realized to an even greater extent when, in Richard's final scene, his death is figuratively anticipated by the image of "nails ... tear[ing] a passage through flinty ribs" (V.v.19-20). Just as in Caesar's death, steel (not flint) penetrates Richard's ribs; but also just as in Caesar's case,

11. Moreover, both Gaunt's mention of "raining hot arrows" and Richard's "darts his light" may advert to another battle tactic used by medieval archers: setting their arrows aflame right before loosing them on their foes.



Shakespeare's purpose in doing so—to allude to the flinty-ribs of St. Sebastian and evoke the imagery of Christ's crucifixion via reference to nails—is unmistakable, and utilized to such pointed effect in *The Hollow Crown* when their version of Judas and his men thrice-penetrate their nearly naked Christ with their flinted-heads, thus crucifying him in his hollow tomb.

“Thy very beadsmen learn to bend their bows / Of double-fatal yew against thy state,” Scrope (Tom Goodman-Hill) tells Richard in the middle of the play; and indeed, both figuratively in the text and literally in the film, the archers hit their mark (III.ii.12-13, *Hollow Crown*). Proponents of the Archetypal branch of literary criticism hold that recurrent and persistent threads of similar motifs, symbols, plots, and themes in disparate works reveal the collective unconscious of humankind and underscore the collective need for Mythic heroes, which Shakespeare's text, BBC's film, and both works' allusions to Christ seem to support. In the above quote we find yet another symbolic link between Richard, Christ, and their pagan antecedents in the word “yew”: Druids revered the yew tree and associated it with sacrifice, death, and rebirth, which the early Christians, in turn, appropriated in order to associate the tree with Christ by claiming that Christ's cross was fashioned from a yew tree (Partridge “Yew”). When *The Hollow Crown* has Aumerle and his men “bend their bows / Of double-fatal yew against” Richard, they too invoke these associations of sacrifice, death, the hollow promise of rebirth, and the mythic figures of Sebastian and Christ—only, in *The Hollow Crown*, Sebastian's and Christ's roles are inverted via the representation of Aumerle's and Richard's. Rather than sacrificing himself for the love of Richard, Aumerle sacrifices his love of Richard for himself. A hollow love for a hollow Christ; a Christ who will not rise again. While Richard undoubtedly bears a

sour cross, suffers a brittle glory, and is in fact a hollow Christ, BBC's adaptation seems to suggest that Richard is no hollower than his mythic original. Indeed, *The Hollow Crown's* examination of human nature and its relationship to false beliefs—in leaders, in myths, in each other—seems to imply that it is the hollowness of our very selves, not unlike the hollow center of a yew tree, that compels us to try to fill the void with hollow messiahs and their hollow promises that, “through the hollow eyes of death,” we might “spy life peering”—if we only suspend our disbelief (II.i.271-2).

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Minimal Impact

Rebecca Matheson

## ***FILM REVIEW:***

### **Paul Thomas Anderson's *Inherent Vice***

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The cultural zeitgeist of 1969-70 U.S. was key in the transformation of the collective American attitude as we moved from the 1960s era of creative expression, drug experimentation and sexual freedom into a decade that seemed defined by the exact opposite ideologies—capitalism and the rise of neoliberalism. The multitude of watershed moments taking place in 1969, from the Nixon inauguration and Woodstock to the Manson family murders and the debut of Sesame Street, marked the end of the peace loving 1960s and shifted into a decade of stronger anti-war sentiments, deeper distrust of the establishment, as well as economic crisis and capitalist greed that the stage for a



massive stock market crash decades later.

Famous for his convoluted, postmodernist storylines, Thomas Pynchon published *Inherent Vice* in 2009, which was brought to the silver screen in 2014 by Paul Thomas Anderson,<sup>1</sup> also famous for densely complex narratives. The main focus in this review will be less on the novel-to-film adaptation, and more on a few ways in which the underlying notion of neoliberalist capitalism are interwoven and addressed throughout the film. The narrative of *Inherent Vice* follows stoner private eye, Larry “Doc” Sportello (played by Joaquin Phoenix), as he wanders through Los Angeles attempting to solve three separate (but related) missing person cases, while circumventing the bizarre world of an underground cult, corrupt LAPD cops, a mysterious drug cartel, multi-billion dollar real estate developments, the FBI, as well as an array of uniquely strange characters. The multiple, intertwining plot lines and numerous peripheral characters introduced throughout the film adds to the difficulty in understanding the narrative.

Anderson’s screen portrayal continues to evoke disparate emotional reactions from its audiences, as the film’s plot truly is difficult to follow. A slow-paced film that clocks in at almost two and a half hours serves to further disengage its audience. The original trailer, purportedly edited by Anderson himself, sells the audience on what seems to be a witty, quick-paced film better aligned with the Coen Brother’s 1998 hit, *The Big Lebowski*. However, *Inherent Vice* better parallels with Quentin Tarantino’s 2019 film, *Once Upon a Time in ... Hollywood*. At the center of both films are stellar performances

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1. Paul Thomas Anderson (b. 1970) is an American filmmaker known for his rich visual style and complex narratives that often include recurring themes such as loneliness and dysfunction. Combined, his films have garnered a total of 25 Oscar nominations, which include highly acclaimed works such as *Boogie Nights* (1997), *There Will be Blood* (2007) and *The Master* (2012).

by its leads, as well as a convoluted and multifaceted storyline that meanders throughout its seemingly never-ending screen time. Both films also focus on one specific pivotal movement in American history, the Manson family murders. While Tarantino’s wraps his story from before/during the murders and completely re-writes a fictionalized version of history, Anderson’s interpretation is far more serious.

While fans of Anderson’s dazed adoption of Pynchon’s stoner-noir may argue that the film improves with repeat viewings (and it does), the fact remains that no matter how many times one views *Inherent Vice*, the plot remains a somewhat meandering mess of intertwining storylines that falls short of a full and satisfying resolution, with only one exception. It is easy to credit the film’s complexity to the idea that Doc is simply hallucinating throughout—but that simply is not the case. So how does one go about enjoying and understanding this groovy film? Much like Tarantino’s oft re-appropriated plotlines, closely following the multitude of references in *Inherent Vice* proves key in understanding the narrative. I spent over five hours on my second viewing of the film, simply in order to take notes and make direct connections to the large number of historical and pop cultural references. Strangely enough, watching the film with subtitles also proved to be quite effective in catching the specific slang and/or slurred dialogue used throughout. Ultimately, *Inherent Vice* is a difficult movie to sit through if the intent is for casual, pleasurable viewing; however, for academics and film enthusiasts who enjoy deconstructing a film, Anderson’s adaptation offers a challenge in successfully analyzing its complex, multilayered structure, via an in-depth analysis of its intricate nuances.

To begin, the film introduces three diverging, yet intertwining storylines, with



Doc at the center of each, as he is hired by three separate individuals to investigate different leads that tie back to the disappearance of ultrarich real estate developer, Mickey Wolfmann (Eric Roberts). Doc's cinematic counterpart is "Bigfoot" Bjornsen (Josh Brolin), a TV actor and cop with the militarized LAPD, keen on perpetrating civil rights violations. Guiding us through the story is narrator Sortilège (Joanna Newsom), who may very well be Doc's hallucinatory, but insightful alter ego. Roughly 10 minutes into the film, we are introduced to Wolfmann's neoliberalist agenda, as Bigfoot, acting as the commercial spokesperson for the new real estate development "Channel View Estates," proudly advises the viewers that purchasing a new home will include no hassle credit checks or down payments. This scene not only sets the tone for the rest of the film, but clearly foreshadows the future of bad loan writing. Of course, it is well documented that Los Angeles has had "a long and sad history of land use," which includes the displacement of disenfranchised, minority groups—a fact that Sortilège explains to the audience.

The film portrays an ongoing battle between the establishment and its counter-culture, with an obvious example being the contentious/humorous relationship between Doc and Bigfoot. Scattered throughout the film are numerous references to the Manson family and the notion of hippie cults, with Anderson sharing a brief and stunning visual tableau of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*, with the ex-junkie sax player and hippie police informant, Coy Harlingen, (Owen Wilson) as the central Jesus-figure.

In understanding the historical context of America in 1970, we cannot ignore the Kent State shootings nor Nixon's reaction to the tragedy. While this event is not directly portrayed in the film, the anti-Nixon sentiment is. Taking some liberties with

historical footage as a way of tying it in with the fictional plotline, Anderson utilizes footage of Nixon discussing the "destructive activists of our universities" as a means of placing blame for police brutality on the liberal agenda of academia and downplaying the deeply engrained anti-war sentiment of the time. Nixon's speech is interrupted by a would-be disgruntled UCLA drop out student, Rick Doppel, which is actually Coy. Coy's doppelgänger name demonstrates the duality of his character(s), as well as the strife-ridden cultural rhetoric the film attempts to highlight.

Two of the film's most significant movements arrive about 90 minutes in, when we are finally given additional information about its most mysterious entity, Golden Fang Enterprises. Similar to billion-dollar, multi-national corporations, Golden Fang is a powerful force taking on many shapes from a boat trafficking heroin from Indochina to a tax shelter syndicate of wealthy dentists. Understanding that most stimulants like heroin have devastating consequences on oral health, selling teeth-destroying drugs and then subsequently offering dental services to repair them, is a deeply drawn criticism of the neoliberal ideology that began to take hold in the 1970s. Sortilège addresses this dilemma, by pointing out that during Ronald Reagan's time as California governor (1967-75), he shut down most state-run mental health facilities, thereby shifting that responsibility onto the private sector. In the film, the privatized asylum is visually portrayed as a ultramodern Zen-like center named, Chryskylodon, run by a Golden Fang-associated cult. This demonstrates the capitalist vice inherent throughout the film's underlying plotline: Golden Fang gets people high and then gets them sober, or what Sortilège refers to as *vertical integration*, which she describes "as long as American life was

something to be escape from, the cartel could always be sure of a bottomless pool of new customers.” Manufacturing a bleak reality as a way to manipulate the vulnerable, in turn causing a crisis where one did not naturally exist, are just a couple of ideas that *Inherent Vice* addresses in its 140 minutes of screen time—ultimately the complex and nuanced level of individual/class struggle are beautifully captured in the film, but one must pay close attention to its intricate narrative in order to catch it.

Before *Inherent Vice*<sup>2</sup> meanders off for its final 40 minutes, we are met with the most significant moment in the film—when Doc finally encounters and confronts Wofmann, in a barely two-minute long scene. Throughout the film, we, along with Doc, are led to believe that Wolfmann was captured and either kidnapped or killed. However, it is revealed that he was placed at Chryskylodon as he had a crisis of consciousness. Having experimented with LSD and peyote, Wolfmann realized he should have been providing housing for free all along, rather than making a profit. Consequently, he was placed in rehab to rid himself of his “bad hippie dream,” as giving away his fortune would be good for society, but certainly not for his stakeholders. The scene closes with Wolfmann seemingly acknowledging he has no choice in the matter, while reluctantly obliging the system he himself helped build. The film concludes with Doc and Shasta driving away, but their destination is a mystery. The scene’s mood is slightly somber, but simultaneously serene. The audience, along with the protagonists, are left with a sense of ambivalence of what the future holds, but there is an implied understanding that living a peaceful, carefree beachside life is something that has now become part of the sacred and unreachable past of a bygone era. While the film’s ending is purposely ambiguous, both

2. I would like to thank AJO for reminding me of this groovy, but oft forgotten film.

visually and story wise, it nevertheless makes a clear a statement of the cultural transition that would occur from the peace-loving 1960s into the neo-liberalist 1970s.





Texture #6

Rebecca Matheson

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Cockle Shells



Rebecca Matheson



## *call for papers*

The *quint's* forty sixth issue is issuing a call for theoretically informed and historically grounded submissions of scholarly interest—as well as creative writing, original art, interviews, and reviews of books and films. The deadline for this call is the 15<sup>th</sup> of May 2020—but please note that we accept manu/digi-scripts at any time.

## *quint guidelines*

All contributions accompanied by a short biography will be forwarded to a member of the editorial board. Manuscripts must not be previously published or submitted for publication elsewhere while being reviewed by *the quint's* editors or outside readers.

Hard copies of manuscripts should be sent to Sue Matheson at *the quint*, University College of the North, P.O. Box 3000, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada, R9A 1M7. We are happy to receive your artwork in digital format, PDF preferred. Email copies of manuscripts, Word or RTF preferred, should be sent to [thequint@ucn.ca](mailto:thequint@ucn.ca).

Essays should range between 15 and 25 pages of double-spaced text in Word, and all images (JPEG) and source citations. Longer and shorter submissions also will be considered. Bibliographic citation should be the standard disciplinary format.

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